

WHAT
VEDANTA
MEANS TO ME,

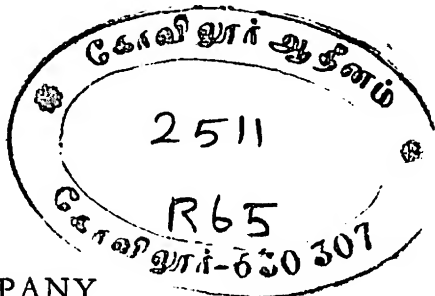
A SYMPOSIUM

Edited by John Yale

With a Foreword by
VINCENT SHEEAN



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Foreword

By asking a comparative stranger, one who is not a member of the Vedanta Society, to introduce the various evidences here presented, the editor wished, I think, to indicate an essential aspect of Vedanta itself: its benign universalism, the welcome it gives to all who seek by whatever way. Curiosity and contradiction are not excluded—they are rather a necessary part of the meditative processes. Even hostility, which would seem to belong to the 'denying' elements, is not rejected, because it also elicits thought.

As it happens, I am incorrigibly curious and much given to contradiction, but not in the very least hostile, so far as I know, to any life-force. To borrow the language of the late Professor Einstein, there are forces 'inimical to life' and others friendly to it. The former are those usually characterized in the Vedas and Upanishads as 'ignorance', and the latter arise from knowledge or the attempt to attain it. Of these latter forces I have been for many years a somewhat tattered camp-follower, trudging along, never quite catching up, broken and weary many a time in the wayside ditch, but never quite without some glimpse of a glint on a peak. This is perhaps the situation in which many or most of us pass our years.

The Vedanta, defining it strictly as the 'end of the Vedas' or the perception to which the Vedas and subsequent Upanishads must lead, is—speaking externally, historically, and critically—India's tremendous contribution to the philosophical powers of mind and spirit in man. From India it made its way, sometimes almost unrecognizable in form, into all the cultures and religions of the earth. The essential concept—God immanent and transcendent—is to be found almost everywhere, although sometimes the ruling cultures or religions may condemn it as heretical. At

times, as during the nineteenth century, it may seem to disappear, but only to emerge again more vividly than ever. Such an emergence took place at the end of that great materialistic century (the century of self-satisfaction) with Sri Ramakrishna and his own particular Saul of Tarsus, Vivekananda, founder of the Ramakrishna Mission and of the Vedanta Society.

No sympathetic or interested observer of the historical phenomenon could fail to see that Vivekananda hoped for more than he achieved: he was a missionary to the West but he did not convert the West. Yet he left centres of interest, teaching, and aspiration all over Europe and the United States. Some of them are extremely flourishing today. Southern California, which produces this book, has greater opportunities of reaching a general public, but it is not unique. There are also (outside the Vedanta Society and the Ramakrishna Mission) sporadic manifestations of Western interest in Indian mysticism, generally concentrated upon some yogi or other, who may or may not be an outright impostor exploiting credulity. Mysticism lends itself to such abuses, but even the most absurd of them must indicate one thing, which is that the desire to find a way does exist.

In India itself the Ramakrishna Mission has evolved into an organized monasticism of far more liberal character than any known in the West. It teaches and heals; its hospitals, schools, shelters, and free kitchens are models: in every famine or flood, in every riot or war or other disaster to which the conditions of life in India may lead, the monks of Ramakrishna are there, like the Franciscans of the thirteenth century in Italy, to serve. Amongst them are men of luminous intellect and an inner security which sheds peace like a benediction. They are not all required to do the same things; their discipline is not that of the West; if one should want to go into the Himalaya to meditate for a year or two, he can do so; there is no violence or brutality in the rule. Tramps and beggars, yes—it is a necessary apprenticeship, as it was with the Franciscans originally—but doctors and teachers, philosophers and friends. As Vivekananda might say, unless a man has been a tramp and a beggar, how can he hope to see God?

One does not go with impunity into and out of any deeply felt experience in India. The same may be true anywhere; it is especially so in India because the specific nature of experience there, as distinct from elsewhere, seems to be its connection with religious perceptions. (Tagore would say it comes from 'the light in the sky', but there may be other reasons.) Few would deny, and many would deplore, the amazing abundance and proliferation of religious impulses in that immeasurable land. An old man of wisdom and benevolence, the late Bhagavan Das of the Hindu University at Benares, told me that he once watched a carpenter working at a wooden idol he was making for some feast day in a village. Bhagavan Das asked him what it was and the man told him the local name for this particular aspect of deity. (It might have been anything; I have forgotten.) Bhagavan said: 'Yes, but what does this mean to you? Is there a god in that piece of wood?' The man said: 'It is only a sign, a representation. God is in me and in you and above.'

Thus, in a somewhat similar spirit, one pours water before the small black idol of Kali at Dakshineswar. I took no shame in doing so, nor in putting a few pomegranate seeds into the hands of the attendant priest. After all, had the Brahmins not admitted me to the temple against their own rule? The sign outside said in several languages: *No Christians or Muslims are admitted*. I found this harsh and said so; the Brahmins said that it did not apply to *friendly* Christians. (I refer, of course, to the actual temple of Kali itself; anybody may go into the outer areas, including the room in which Sri Ramakrishna lived when he was priest of the temple.) These and many, many other instances have led me to think that all the external trappings of a multifarious and burgeoning religiosity in India were only that and nothing more. There are idolatries and superstitions, yes, and too many, but they cluster about a central perception of divinity which is their core of light; it is strange to say, but that perception keeps even sticks and stones from utter insignificance in the places where they are worshipped.

Mahatma Gandhi recommended to me the Ishopanishad, so short, so overwhelming, with its opening declaration: 'The whole

world is the garment of the Lord.' I have only recently (ten years afterwards) learned that the Ishopanishad, the shortest one, is actually the fortieth chapter of the Yajurveda, which makes it vastly older than any Upanishad could be. Its abstract and philosophical nature seems different from the precise, ritualistic, and poetic statements in the Vedas, and yet the Sanskrit texts are almost the same. In short, this highly advanced or even crystallized piece of late Vedanta, which might be vaguely supposed to date from about three millennia backwards in time, is probably about five thousand years old.

I do not think Gandhi knew it. If he had known it he would have told me so. And with Hindu chronology in its present state of chaos and disputation, it does not matter much anyhow. What does matter is that the statements one reads today by the authors of this book, so gifted in expression and sincere in feeling, are living discoveries of ancient truth. Each gets to the Isha, back through the ages, into the forest and up to the stars, by an authentic highway of the pilgrim's own making. We may learn from them how diverse but invariable are their ways. We cannot learn from them how to do it. This we must learn for ourselves, and it takes longer so. Each book which helps is to be valued. Erudition is an instrument, a stout staff. Experience is a guide. The feet—well, the feet are just our feet and nothing more. We always hope they will be tough enough for the road.

VINCENT SHEEAN

Introduction

To have composed the present book would have been impossible a generation or two ago. The new religious force it describes had not as yet made its effect felt; Vedanta and Sri Ramakrishna had hardly been heard of in the Western world. Then, too, the accepted attitude in Europe and America several decades back was that anything unchristian must be possibly dangerous and certainly of questionable taste. Very few in the West would have been willing—or able, even if willing—to admit to non-orthodoxy in religious outlook. The interest in foreign attitudes was primarily in the opportunities they afforded well-meaning Westerners to convert adherents therefrom.

It is true that as early as the start of the nineteenth century Sanskrit had been discovered by Western scholars and the treasures of that ancient language glimpsed. As time went on Europeans such as Schopenhauer, Hartmann, and Nietzsche felt the influence of Eastern thought, as did Thoreau, Emerson, and Whitman in America. The great Oxford Orientalist, Max Müller, was carrying on his enthusiastic explorations of Vedic subjects, an interest shared by Paul Deussen of the University of Kiel. Gautama Buddha gained attention also in the later 1800's, so that on many library tables in Victorian households, between the potted fern and the stereopticon, there rested a copy of Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia*.

Perhaps a generation ago in Europe and the United States began in earnest the study of comparative religion. Non-Christian faiths were taken up and examined. The good features of foreign creeds were observed and their inadequacies noted. The general result perhaps was meant to be the establishment of new convictions helpful in shoring up Christianity. But it also transpired in

practice that valid features of other faiths were perceived; with the result that alongside a strengthened missionary spirit there came into being also a conviction, advanced by such men as William James and Rudolf Otto, that the inner core of all religions—the mystical experience—must be essentially identical in every faith.

It is no secret that for centuries the dynamic influence of Christianity in shaping morality and in regenerating human personality had been declining. Deterioration sets in in time in all great forces. In response, there were various developments. Many people in Christian nations gave up the practice of religion entirely, trying to find satisfaction in one or another of various materialistic pursuits. Some were content to jog along, with religion reduced to a kind of good-will sociality. Those Westerners who sincerely desired spirituality had little alternative in many cases but to retreat into reactionism: Catholic exclusiveness became more rigid than ever; and Protestantism developed a strongly authoritarian neo-orthodoxy. Some would-be aspirants searched for useful features in alien faiths, so that there was for a time the stirring into Christianity of ingredients plucked from foreign fields, producing the various New Thought mixtures.

Finally, there were a very few who grew to hear about and to become drawn to Vedanta; and it is these who speak of their need, their search, and the satisfactions found, in the pages which follow.

Vedanta is at least three things. In its first meaning the word is a synonym for that amalgam of social observances, national practices, and religious rites followed variously by 300,000,000 Indians—namely Hinduism. Secondly, Vedanta is the name of one of the several systems of Indian philosophy. And finally Vedanta refers to a body of teachings and practices emphasized by the nineteenth-century God-man, Sri Ramakrishna, who revived the old, pure spirituality of the Vedas, which asserted: All religious practices are equally valid routes to knowledge of God if engaged in with sincerity; but God-knowledge is something different from and beyond any route or combination thereof; and the active quest for God-knowledge can be the only worth-while

pursuit of man. In this third sense Vedanta is equivalent to the Perennial Philosophy, to eternal mysticism.

In the work of the Ramakrishna movement elements of Vedanta in all three aspects will be found, but particularly of the third. And it is with this latter spirit of universality that the writers of this book are especially concerned.

Vedanta has been called a 'spiritual religion'. Rightly so. Its basic tenet is that the Ground of all being is God. There is nothing but God. I am God; you are God; the pulsations seen as matter—again, all God.

[But for some reason this divinity is overlaid with a world of appearance. Something is lying on the ground. It is actually a rope. But in the darkness as I am taking a walk, perhaps timidly anyway, I stop dead in fright. I see a snake stretched out across my path. I have mistaken actuality for appearance. Thus every man moves through a dark, deceiving world, reacting to that which he himself projects before him. By analysis of this appearance I shall never get at truth; by breaking down matter or mind or personality I shall never reach the Real, for matter and mind are reflections only—reflections of the Real. This false appearance is what is called maya. In its sway we become unhappy or desirous; we see good and evil. If we stay under the domination of maya we are made to work for foolish ends, die frustrated, and come back to continue the process.]

The purpose of life, Vedanta avers, is to wake up, to bring a light to the path, to learn to see things as they really are—to get out of maya. Why there is maya, of what it is constituted, Vedanta does not try to explain. But it proclaims that the purpose of existence is to shake off its bewitchment. As was long ago recommended, a sensible man, seeing a house on fire, would not spend his energies in studying the pattern of the flames, trying to discover how the fire got its start, or seeking to determine which materials are most flammable and which least; he would move purposefully to get some water and would try to put the blaze out.]

The way to come out of maya, for man to claim his real wide-awake Selfhood, Vedanta says, is for him somehow to learn to identify with the Divinity he really is (that is, the Atman) instead of

the appearance he seems to be. Such effort is called yoga—some process for ‘yoking’ the mind to one’s real Being.

✓Dehypnotization is accomplished by identifying with something divine. If I can love something higher and purer than I am and do so intensely and consistently, gradually I can forget my small, mean self and introject the qualities of the source I adore. The objects of veneration may be various. Vedanta affirms that God is so compassionate as to have made everything in the whole world helpful, if one can love it as God. God himself has come again and again in tremendously appealing figures, as avatars and incarnations. These it is easy to esteem. But Vedanta says also that if one can serve and worship his teacher as God, or his wife or husband or children, or the poor and sick, or even a stone or wood representation of the Divine, that will do as much to uplift him as will falling at the feet of a Jesus or a Krishna. The thing to do is to love something higher than oneself, with the awareness that it is God, hence neglect the small self with its limiting motives. In the process the big Self is allowed to become manifested.

This tremendous constructiveness is an appealing feature of Vedanta, most suitable in the modern age.

Finally, we are helped to our eventual clear-sightedness through the operation of two laws, of karma and of reincarnation. These simply guarantee that we get what we truly want, with all effort producing its just result, and that we are allotted plenty of time in which to do it—many existences in which to learn, to discard, and to move up.]

This, then, is a cursory statement of what Vedanta is. Different features are emphasized in the stories which follow. The interesting fact is that religion is taking over people’s lives again in the West. Commencing anew, God is becoming a passionate concern. People are learning inwardness, practising renunciation, losing themselves once more in the West in a spiritual religion.

And not only a spiritual religion, but one compatible with modern knowledge. A divided outlook is as dated in today’s world as the flat-earth theory. To read the latest conjectures of astronomy or physics is to find the mind moved on its moorings.

The universe is being seen to be much more diverse, and at the same time unified, than could have been imagined. What sense can a rigid theology make in times like these? What justification has any programme of trying to delimit God's forms and graces? A spiritual religion is a passport to a big ocean of subtlety. To be lost in the wonder and bliss of God, like the viewer of the vast heavens or like the observer at the atomic accelerator watching matter disintegrate into energy, into spirit, before his very eyes—such is the happy lot of today's man. A religion compatible with the new knowledge is what is indicated for the modern age. And this, the contributors to this symposium feel, is what Vedanta can give.

The modern renaissance of Vedanta, about which this book concerns itself, was set in motion by an individual named Sri Ramakrishna. The facts of his life are few and seem simple. Born Gadadhar Chattopadhyaya in 1836 in a small village in up-country Bengal, this man spent his adult years employed as a priest in the service of a temple near Calcutta. He had little formal education, and the only travelling he did was to make one trip to some of the holy places in northern India. He lived in communion with God, spoke forth his gospel freely to all who came to him and cared to listen, and trained a few disciples. He is described as having been an amazing and adorable figure, and he seemed so human and warm that even those who regarded him as divine could with difficulty feel him to be anything but a marvellously lovable, approachable figure. He died at the age of fifty. But to a few in his time, and to a growing number since, this being was seen as the latest incarnation of God.

This is not the place to try to appraise Sri Ramakrishna or to argue his merits. But let it be supposed for the purpose of the present work that Sri Ramakrishna was an avatar; and let it be agreed also for argument's sake that the current moment marks the beginning of a new religious era. If this is allowed, then we find the stories which follow to be most valuable documents. The contents of this book become a collection of writings of early religious pioneers.

Such an idea as this would seem ridiculous to the men and women who have given the evidences which follow. Yet could not the same be said of the situation prevailing two thousand years ago? If Christ had been fully known when alive to have been the Saviour of the Western world, how could anyone have approached him? And if His disciples and His grand-disciples had realized themselves to be historic figures, how could they have behaved as human beings or been regarded as examples? Logic suggests that the early fathers of the Christian movement were very much like the people represented in the present book—human, fallible, but deeply devoted and enthusiastic; in short, struggling spiritual aspirants on their way to making good.

If we admit the premises here advanced, the present collection of writings takes on considerable interest and significance. Only the future can render judgement as to whether this evaluation is fanciful or is the fact.

Sri Ramakrishna died in 1886. He left a band of monastic disciples to carry on his work. One of them, Swami Brahmananda, remained in India and gave direction to the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, an Order actualizing Ramakrishna's revelation. Another, the famed Swami Vivekananda, made lecture tours through America and Europe, arousing an interest which later resulted in the organization in the West of a number of Vedanta teaching centres. Several of these were in the first years shepherded by certain additional of Sri Ramakrishna's direct disciples; when these men died or returned to India the leadership was taken over by second-generation members of the Order. Gradually congregations of Occidental Vedantists formed. Writing and publishing developed also, so that in due course a body of Ramakrishna-Vedanta literature in English and other European languages came into being.

One of the Western centres, called the Vedanta Society of Southern California, is at Hollywood. It was organized in 1930 by Swami Prabhavananda, a disciple himself of Swami Brahmananda, and is still headed by him. Through this grandson of Sri Ramakrishna the riches of Indian spirituality, taught and lived in terms Western people can appreciate, have been for the past thirty

years daily on display. A large organization with two dozen monastics and over three hundred lay members, complete with some good property and a small endowment, has grown up. The people who have written their stories in this book are all in one way or another associated with the Vedanta Society of Southern California and its leader. More than half are disciples of Swami Prabhavananda.

The contents of this book were all produced by Westerners. This was intentional. Only non-Indians were asked to contribute to the 'What Vedanta Means to Me' series. What was really wanted was declarations of what Vedanta means to the person who comes to it not through heritage but through conviction. Except for this similarity, and the fact that all the articles were originally published in the Society's magazine *Vedanta and the West*, the sixteen contributors are totally diverse. The majority are householders, but there are three monastics. Some have famous names; some do not. Several occupations, socio-economic levels, and educational situations are represented. It is said in Vedanta that the Lord selects His own. The dissimilarity of contributors to this book supports that idea. There is no average type of Vedantist and it is impossible to predict who will be attracted to Vedanta. The same idea was expressed in Christ's teachings: 'Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and ordained you that ye should go and bring forth fruit.' Or in another way of putting it, those whose struggles and karmas have brought them to the place where they are hungry for a spiritual religion are drawn to Vedanta. Because of this thinking Vedanta does not labour to win adherents; to do so would be out of character with its own propositions, and the present work is not to be construed as a showcase of converts. Vedanta permits its attractions to be seen; but it does not proselytize.

It had seemed desirable to end this introduction with a statement of what new thing Sri Ramakrishna did or taught—what new revelation he brought that had never been known before. Swami Prabhavananda was asked about this. The Swami thought for a while and then said: 'No, Sri Ramakrishna introduced

nothing actually new. In an age of international acquaintanceship it is true that he stressed permissiveness toward all attitudes. He insisted that all religions are valid. But this was nothing previously unknown. Sri Ramakrishna reintroduced what has ever been understood by the real seer and what has always been the fact. He displayed through his fantastic longing that to know God is the only end of human life. He demonstrated through following various religious paths that all approaches to God are efficacious. But this did not constitute anything actually new; only a reminder to man who forgets again and again, of something lost sight of. There is nothing exotic in religion. It has all been there for ever. We are blinded by maya and fail to see the treasure so near at hand; but if we seek it, its discovery is certain and quick.'

This is the theme that runs through the pages which follow: that there is in Vedanta nothing new. Although the acceptance of Oriental ideas is much readier now than it was a generation ago, the person opening this volume may still do so with the idea that he is going to find something in it curious and foreign and occult. But if he will read it he will see that such is not the case. Vedanta does not take you away from anything. It helps you to get home. It helps you to understand yourself and other people and the way the world works—and it certainly gives assistance in comprehending Jesus and early, pure Christianity.

The walls between people are high and thick. In this there is pain. The no-man's-lands within each human person are equally perilous. But in all living beings there is a haven, a home. By following the mystical element of any religion a man can enter that home, wherein all troubles will cease. The claim herein presented is merely this, that in the present day and age Vedanta is an especially effective agency for helping the homesick find habitation.

When he gets home a man will see that that place is the home of all. No one is a stranger there. Vedanta, then, does not take anyone away from anything. If one will read the pages which follow one will see that Vedanta provides an effectual means for joining one together with himself, with others, and with his own divine destiny.

Gerald Sykes

I HAVE never been in India, but I have read some books about it. Many other Americans share my literary tourism. We have all been exposed to the same intellectual landmarks, though we have not all sent home the same postcards. Some of my fellow countrymen will disagree sharply with what I am going to say; others will only wish I had said it better.

My modest voyage began with Kipling's *Just So Stories*, from which, like many other ex-children, I can still quote phrases like 'the great, grey, green, greasy Limpopo River, all set about with fever trees' without consulting it. And when I was a little older I read other Kipling books, of which I remember best *Plain Tales from the Hills* and *Kim*—and of course poems like *Gunga Din* and *The Road to Mandalay*. But I put away these things when I approached manhood and read Forster's *A Passage to India*, where a numerous and interesting people were no longer patronized but treated as possibly more subtle and complex than their conquerors.

The exquisiteness of Forster's art stayed with me a few years later, during our Depression, when Marxism dominated much of our literary world, and when I read a book which obviously had been pole-starred by it, Orwell's *Burmese Days*, I admired both the skill of its realism and the honesty of its despair, but I was also aware that its characters had been packed into some narrow preconceptions of their creator. When nothing triumphs in a story but boredom, malice, and swindle we are justified in taking a closer look at the storyteller. It would have been academic, however, to complain of Orwell's deficiencies, since his contribution to our common Western enlightenment about a little-known area

was much more important. If he had merely imitated, the poised mastery of Forster, he would have estranged himself from his material and falsified his talent. He belonged to a later generation—and to a timeless type of writer—to whom mastery seemed unreal and emasculating; he made no attempt to transcend a nihilistic *Zeitgeist*; he preferred in fact to be its victim, because thus his dismal—and prophetic—vision was best realized. He sacrificed his happiness to his talent: a social heroism that is usually deprecated by those who aspire to psychological fulfilment and philosophical serenity, though it does not lack for admirers today, especially in the literary world, where certain advance-guard cults believe that gloom and anxiety, softened by partisan exclusiveness, are inseparable from depth of vision and excellence of execution. (Here a courageous existentialist despair is abused which, with more honesty and less self-indulgence, might be a precondition of new strength.)

So far I had travelled through three English attitudes towards India—Kipling's imperialism, Forster's humanism, Orwell's revolutionism—without venturing into serious contact with Indian attitudes towards India. I had read some Indian books, of course, and I knew that the origins of modern Western psychology, which interested me greatly, had been traced by historians to the Upanishads, which had been read in translation by Schopenhauer and had given much to his concept of Will, which in turn had given much to Freud's concept of the Unconscious; and therefore some of our most advanced theories about the nature of man were reflections of Eastern thought. How pale were the reflections I had learned from Jung, who said that we Westerners 'do not yet realize that while we are turning upside down the material world of the East with our technical proficiency, the East with its psychic proficiency is . . . fastening its hold upon us from within'. I had also lived for a while in the Middle East, without however getting as far as India, and thus I had been exposed not only in mind but in body to Oriental influences. These must have been profound; my imagination returns to them again and again.

.

My preparation for direct contact with Indian thought had been slow. The reason for my hesitancy, I think, was literary. I am a writer and I live in a time when a writer must assimilate much more new knowledge than has customarily been expected of him. I acquire new knowledge with some reluctance because I know that I write best about subjects that I have somewhat at least made my own, that I have somewhat at least lived my way into. Facts, to become poetic, must be fused with being. It would be ridiculous to believe that my sympathies, however eagerly they reach out, are capable of indefinite extension, or to refuse to consider my all too human limitations. The path of artistic wisdom leads through a pragmatic briar-patch of humility to the garden that one has to cultivate. In anyone self-condemned to literary activity there is an unshakable suspicion that it is better to be a functioning provincial than a deracinated world-citizen who knows more than he can re-create effectively. This is an earthy counsel that a writer disregards at his peril. (Unfortunately, he *has* to disregard it nowadays; he has to be uprooted before he can hope to be re-rooted. Despite T. S. Eliot, there is no literary or ecclesiastical tradition to sustain him, and no gentlemanly way of skirting the moral upheaval that is required for moral survival.)

Also, a Westerner must hesitate before going outside his own tradition. And Americans have to struggle extra-hard even to familiarize themselves with Western tradition, and it is asking quite a bit of them, when they have at last begun to absorb it, when Christianity has been seen as more than small-town, mechanical morality, when Greek mythology comes alive, when science becomes a discipline as well as a source of inventions, when European languages have been mastered, when European thought has been appreciated, when European art has become idiomatic, when there is no more trouble with the advance guard than with the classics, when transatlantic political interactions begin to be understood, it is asking quite a bit of American tourists, who have already ranged so far from hinterland origins, to turn their back on these difficult cultural accomplishments and

to pioneer still farther East. Yet that is exactly what is demanded of them by silent Eastern pressures. Their quest of tranquillity is strenuous. No wonder some of them try a California short cut. No wonder more of them get no farther than New York—or London or Paris or Rome—and insist that there are no Eastern pressures except those that are clamorously military, economic, or political. (The latter have become so insistent lately in Korea, China, Indo-China, Iran, and elsewhere that the ingenuity of our practical men is sure to be taxed if they are to go on believing that material problems can be isolated from other problems.) No wonder so many of our American writers and readers stick to a familiar native, extraverted, roughneck tradition—and retreat from the mounting complications of world experience and world thought.

My first real contact with Indian thought—which would have been impossible if I had been either natively extraverted or literarily contemptuous of religious experience—came when by chance I picked up an abridgement of M's biography of Sri Ramakrishna. Within a few minutes it became clear that I should have to read it carefully, and that night I found myself waking, after only two hours' sleep, to go on with it. It spoke to me more directly than any book I had read since the New Testament. I no longer regarded myself as a Christian, but I had been hit hard. I soon arranged for a termination of my job, withdrew from my friends, lived in a lonely place, drew upon my savings, and devoted myself to the study of many volumes of Eastern literature—not only Hindu but Buddhist, Taoist, Zen, Confucian, and literary, historical, political, and economic—that I now wished to read and, through extensive commentary in my notebooks, to assimilate as much as possible. Until then a misguided perfectionism had made it extremely difficult for me to write. Within a year I had written three books, many short stories, articles, reviews, in addition to some quarter of a million painstaking words in my notebooks. From a dry creek I had turned into a verbal torrent that needed control if it were to become of any use to me—control, I learned

later, that was to call for a painful re-entrance into the world from which I was then blissfully withdrawing.

My intoxication was no less than I had felt, a few years earlier, when I inhaled the gusts of primitive Christianity that blew through the great novels of nineteenth-century Russia. A child of practical America had again been overwhelmed by a still more intense form of Eastern spirituality, although he had seen at first hand, and studied in detail, some of the degradation that accompanies it. This time, he resolved, he would use his intoxication systematically in rebuilding a life with which he was certainly dissatisfied. Otherwise his remote tour of India would be little more than spiritual imperialism, and in the name of philosophical education he would be merely yielding to the voluptuousness of exciting foreign methods. Even to the sceptical aesthete, mystical thought is one of the most beautiful flowers of all human cultivation, and connoisseurship in it leads inevitably to the superior gardens of the East, but botanically it seems to belong to a species of lotus, and only a few can come safely near it, which no doubt is why the tough-minded, with their statistical obsession, mistrust it. I also, however, am duly subject to all the statistical hazards, and so I resolved either to use it as well as the few whose lives it had demonstrably rebuilt or to drop it.

I was capable of neither. I couldn't drop it and I couldn't give up my whole life to it. Temperament, vocation, and the history of my people had decided otherwise. After a considerable period of withdrawal, as conscientious and as ascetic as I could make it, I saw my friends again, married, and resumed my occupation with a clarity of desire such as I had not previously been able to achieve. Writing was my yoga, I decided, and in my case inner harmony based on aloofness would mean an evasion of hard literary discipline, as well as of the intensive life-experience that it required. New perspectives and new techniques had been shown me, which slowly I might be able to master, and I knew I was taking leave of the most single-pointed period of my life, but I had to try for a fulfilment better suited to my nature, my background, and my proper task. It would be none the less religious, I hoped, because

it was inclusive rather than exclusive, secular rather than monastic, and flung me into the midst of what Ramakrishna considered the chief impediments to spiritual progress, 'woman' and 'gold'. On the other hand, it might cause me to lose the few gains I had made. It might wear me down, rub the nap off my enthusiasm, cost me the certainties I had felt when I was alone, and finally destroy me. Such were the risks I ran as I returned to a way of life that, I see now, a force larger than myself had decided that I should never leave. Was it a good force or bad? I do not know. But I had to act as I did.

The central problem of every modern writer is the disintegration that is the central fact of our society. How to handle it? This is an extremely subtle question which requires a separate answer in every case. If broad outlines may be discerned, and common answers found, there seem to be three main responses. The first is aesthetic, and counsels the writer to accept disintegration poetically and, so to speak, amorally: a fact of nature along with all the others. Although this attitude has contributed to the effectiveness of some of the most memorable writers of our century—Joyce is an example and, on a more traditional level, Forster—I believe that it belonged more appropriately to a literary generation that came of age before 1914, that it has long since reached the point of diminishing returns (except commercially) and now props neurotically an advance-guard academy which daily grows more repetitious.

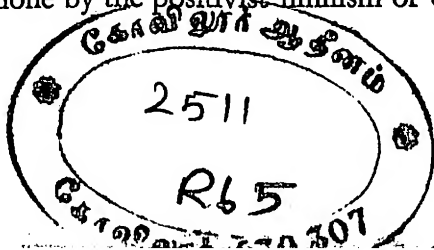
The second response is political, and counsels us to resist disintegration socially. This is the programme of Communism, which however also calls for a suppression of individuality and of truth-seeking that is fatal to literature. The third response is philosophic and religious and counsels us to conquer disintegration within ourselves. It is the programme of Christianity, of course, and also of Vedanta, India's principal exportation to our shores.

Theoretically, no good American writers will neglect any useful methods—aesthetic, political, philosophical, or religious—

that will help them to cope with their ever-increasing problems. Actually, they live in a place where there is so much more emphasis upon political—and other material—considerations than upon any other kind as to make the existence of other kinds at times appear dubious. Occasionally a successful retreat into aestheticism may be managed, but this occurs less and less frequently, since aestheticism always feeds upon dying faith. The number of writers willing and able to attempt a square confrontation of new psychological, philosophical, and religious problems is still extremely small, and perhaps must always be so, in the nature of things. Certainly there is little danger that the United States will become what Vivekananda called India, a 'tyranny of the sages'. If there is any tyranny here, and most of our poets decidedly think there is, it is a tyranny of things and public opinion.

What can our good writers get from Vedanta? Leaving aside the fact that it, like any other creed, can be abused, what does it offer of possible literary value? To answer in the tough-minded language appropriate to our time and place, it contains a powerful dynamic in the amazingly scientific emphasis that it puts upon the conservation of energy in the building of character. Also, it seems to me theologically subtler and more truly universal than any Western system of religious thought, though I confess that this opinion may be coloured by the fact that Vedanta is for me relatively free from disillusioning associations, while our Western systems are full of them. Psychologically, when closely examined, Vedanta makes our best Western methods seem decidedly derivative and often superficial, though it loses much if it fails to achieve a close integration with them. Ethically, it can also be a source of grave self-deception unless integrated with a Western passion for justice, a Western awareness of material problems, and a compassionate concern for the world's sorrows. Humanly, it offers a systematic cure for self-inflation that no Westerners, especially those with talent, can afford to ignore.

Historically, it plainly suffers from the fact that there is still vast stable-cleaning to be done by the positivist nihilism of our



advance guard. Indian thought has fallen inopportunately athwart two Americas, and except in a few very intelligent cases it appeals to a romantic idealism that is considerably more unhealthy than the most arrogant determinism. Most Americans live either on a biological, pre-psychological level—or on a false elevation that ignores biological and economic realities. That is why Indian influence upon this country has been chiefly cultish. Though it is sometimes interpreted by excellent masters of English (who are writing more of our future spiritual legislation, perhaps, than we imagine) it still does not speak our idiom. Continued disillusionment with our practical accomplishments and with the untenable political attitudes to which they lead us, however, will probably change both our philosophical and our literary tastes. But first our romanticism must be roughly burnt away. It must be remembered that, unlike older nations, we have had no indigenous, hard, earthy, religio-mythico-classical tradition, and that *all* our quasi-sacred literary classics—Whitman, Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Poe, Melville—are romantics. That is why we plead for consciousness, and then resist it incalculably. We have had a heroic raw experience which, if we are to survive as a nation, must be transformed into consciousness and art—and it is precisely consciousness and art that we are most stoutly resisting.

As a people, it has often been observed, we are always reaching out for those ancient experiences that our New World origins have denied us. Formerly our spiritual search extended only to Europe and the Holy Land; now it includes Asia. More and more of us are already touring India, whether at a distance or in person. Interest has of course been quickened by India's material need of us, which provides a convenient screen for our real desires (especially since these coincide presently with our diplomatic-military manœuvres against the Soviet Union). I too begin to feel ready for an actual voyage, if I can find the money for it, now that I *think* I have survived the one described here briefly. I have reconciled myself to the much greater tensions that I have known since I first let myself be taught by India. I have grown accustomed to the scorn of my intellectual friends. Now I want to see at first

hand that 'tyranny of the sages' which sacrifices millions of people to produce a few spiritual giants. I want to face the misery and the grandeur to which I owe so much.

What can I find there that I couldn't find at home? Nothing, of course. That which must be elusive will be elusive anywhere. But to one accustomed to a lifetime of hearing its existence denied, perhaps there would come new strength, and new skill at finding it, even though it is everywhere.

Aldous Huxley

RESearch by means of controlled sense-intuitions into material reality—research motivated and guided by a working hypothesis, leading up through logical inference to the formulation of a rational theory, and resulting in appropriate technological action. That is natural science.

No working hypothesis means no motive for starting the research, no reason for making one experiment rather than another, no rational theory for bringing sense or order to the observed facts.

Contrariwise, too much working hypothesis means finding only what you *know*, dogmatically, to be there and ignoring all the rest.

Among other things, religion is also research. Research by means of pure intellectual intuition into non-sensuous, non-psychic, purely spiritual reality, descending to rational theories about its results and to appropriate moral action in the light of such theories.

To motivate and (in its preliminary stages) guide this research, what sort and how much of a working hypothesis do we need?

None, say the sentimental humanists; just a little bit of Wordsworth, say the blue-dome-of-nature boys. Result: they have no motive impelling them to make the more strenuous investigations; they are unable to explain such non-sensuous facts as come their way; they make very little progress in Charity.

At the other end of the scale are the Papists, the Jews, the Moslems, all with historical, one-hundred-per-cent revealed religions. These people have a working hypothesis about non-

sensuous reality—which means that they have a motive for doing something to get to know about it. But because their working hypotheses are too elaborately dogmatic, most of them discover only what they were taught to believe. But what they believe is a hotch-potch of good, less good and even bad. Records of the infallible intuitions of great saints into the highest spiritual reality are mixed up with records of the less reliable and infinitely less valuable intuitions of psychics into lower levels of non-sensuous existence; and to these are added mere fancies, discursive reasonings and sentimentalisms, projected into a kind of secondary objectivity and worshipped as though they were divine facts. But at all times and in spite of the handicap imposed by these excessive working hypotheses, a passionately persistent few continue the research to the point where they become aware of the Intelligible Light and are united with the divine Ground.

For those of us who are not congenitally the members of any organized Church, who have found that humanism and blue-domeism are not enough, who are not content to remain in the darkness of spiritual ignorance, the squalor of vice or that other squalor of mere respectability, the minimum working hypothesis would seem to be about as follows:

That there is a Godhead or Ground, which is the unmanifested principle of all manifestation.

That the Ground is transcendent and immanent.

That it is possible for human beings to love, know and, from virtually, to become actually identified with the Ground.

That to achieve this unitive knowledge, to realize this supreme identity, is the final end and purpose of human existence.

That there is a Law or Dharma, which must be obeyed, a Tao or Way, which must be followed, if men are to achieve their final end.

That the more there is of I, me, mine, the less there is of the Ground; and that consequently the Tao is a Way of humility and compassion, the Dharma a Law of mortification and self-transcending awareness. Which accounts, of course, for the facts of human history. People love their egos and don't wish to mortify

them, don't wish to see why they shouldn't 'express their personalities' and 'have a good time'. They get their good times; but also and inevitably they get wars and syphilis and revolution and alcoholism, tyranny and, in default of an adequate religious hypothesis, the choice between some lunatic idolatry, like nationalism, and a sense of complete futility and despair. Unutterable miseries! But throughout recorded history most men and women have preferred the risks, the positive certainty, of such disasters to the laborious whole-time job of trying to get to know the divine Ground of all being. In the long run we get exactly what we ask for.

Gerald Heard

‘**D**EFINE your terms,’ the reader will say, as he has a right to. For the phrase ‘What Vedanta Means to Me’ is, if not ambiguous, certainly double. It calls for both what I *mean* by Vedanta and also what Vedanta *does* for me. That is, what do I take Vedanta to be; and how for me does it seem to work?

Clearly then, I must take the first question first. The definition given in Vedantic literature seems to me satisfactory: the three-fold statement that man’s nature is divine, that it is the aim of man’s life here on earth to unfold the divine nature within him, and that this basic truth is universal—that is, that every religion that has inspired mankind has been trying to state these facts. In short, Vedanta offers that system of thought and way of life for which increasingly men have been looking: a universal religion in which could be combined all men of good will.

I think, too, I would and may add something to the above answer to the question of what does Vedanta mean. What makes it seem to me the best theory of and reaction to the whole is, in a phrase, that its span is commensurate with its grasp. That is to say, it is vastly tolerant, or to be more precise, charitable. And it is also precisionally free from sentiment. In it kindness and truth are not in conflict. It secures these supreme values, these necessities of a universal religion, by its teaching that God is at once immanent and transcendent. To use a condensed technical term, it sees the problem of evil as arising from the problem of time, and the riddle of an objective world—which appears largely irrelevant—it perceives as an issue of epistemology. In consequence, it is neither careless nor despairing about pain and sin. It neither says they are just accidents soon to be swept away by more

accurate science, nor does it say that each individual makes his own world. Either alternative is seen as too simple.

Vedanta would allow that we have made this world as it seems to us, but it would also add that the 'we' who make it are no more the various egos who think themselves the final units of consciousness than that 'we' are the creator gods who in backward myths are said to be the makers of the world. Vedanta, as far as I know, teaches that within time there is evil as ruthlessly real as time itself. But rise above time and there is no evil. All the great religions have of course taught that God is eternal—not everlasting, for that is to be extended in time. Therefore he does not dispute with evil. But only the mystics have consistently taught that rising to union with him is the one way in which that problem can be transcended; for only the transcendent and those who are united in the unity of the One are beyond evil. To say that evil does not exist and still to desire the appetites, love possessions, and claim recognition is to demonstrate ignorance, not transcendence.

Vedanta is then cosmologically satisfactory. It shows that what we call evil is a misapprehension, but it is a misapprehension more real because more persistent than that of the hypnotized patient whose skin swells into a painful blister when he is told that the cold penny let drop on his flesh was 'really' red-hot.

Of course one great religion, Buddhism, that sprang from Vedanta, criticized its parent for having *any* cosmology. Systems of metaphysics, Buddhism treated as fetters. But that Vedanta's minimum was and is necessary has been proved by four things.

First, Buddhism split on this issue and the Mahayana built up a metaphysic as vast if not vaster than Vedanta's.

Second, the Pali, 'southern' school, rejecting all metaphysic, tried to operate with nothing but a psychology. In consequence it has always been in danger of forging an instrument that could be used for bad quite as much as for good purposes. The most striking illustration of this is given by the development of Mahayana in Japan where the Zen teachers, anxious to rid themselves

of the vast ritual and speculation of the late Mahayana, again tried to reduce Buddhism to an empiric psychology and made from many Zen initiates perfect instruments for the fanatic nationalism that brought Japan to defeat. In the meantime, in the Ceylonic schools we can say the doctrine of holy selfishness—a phrase coined by St. Jerome—was preached with a grim logical frankness. For where there is no doctrine of grace and no clear teaching as to what the enlightened state is and its relation is to the needs of others, then it is impossible to regard compassion as other than, in Dr. Hocking's phrase, the 'noble inconsistency' in the noble path.

Third, Buddhism had for some time no message for the layman and could not have. When it did it was committed to what it accepted as, and what in the West has been called, the doctrine of the two lives, lay and monastic. Inevitably also, as was the West, it became committed to a doctrine of *four* lives: that of the simple active, who can keep no more than the code of justice and avoid wanton cruelty; that of the just merchant; that of the chivalrous knight, and that of the specifically 'religious', who was to aim at the law of charity.

Fourth and finally, Vedanta not only originally taught that there were four lives—that is, four kinds of mankind incarnate—but Vedanta was as rich laterally as it was longitudinally. It had not only four stations for various types of mankind on the ladder of being; it had parallel places for those who might be similarly advanced, of equal spirituality, but needing different methods to help them to the final liberation and enlightenment. All religions lead to God and all converge on that final God—quite true—but till late on the path, people of great goodness may need to use different methods. This fact has often led to bitter intolerance, with ritualists persecuting those who were unhelped by its dramatic forms, non-ritualists treating as abominable idolators those who used images. Vedanta has avoided this danger also.

It would seem then that in Vedanta—once its universalism is understood—must lie the religion of mankind. As it moves over the world, it will tend to express its eternal and universal truth

in the vernacular of the era in which it is conveying its message.

These then very briefly seem to be some of the main reasons why one may believe that Vedanta, with its interpretive charity towards the other great faiths, may become the spiritual spokesman for mankind.

And now as to the further question: What does Vedanta do for a particular experiment and experimenter? There one may say that its particular blend of empiricism with metaphysic, the width of its cosmology, the vastness of the picture which it gives of human destiny, and the immediate practicalness of its advices and practices—this amalgam seems most suitable to anyone who wants a method which is psychological and a world view that can match modern knowledge of the cosmos.

The knife-edge in this respect runs between a faith that is rightly urgent and a knowledge that is vastly patient. In Vedanta there is what may be called 'the choice of dooms': a non-human birth, a repeated human birth that is bad, fair, or good, gradual post-mortem enlightenment through passing through the brahma-loka, enlightenment at the moment of death, and enlightenment while still in the body. This richness of choice makes for neither panic nor slackness. Many religions have sought to produce urgency by teaching the irrevocable finality of the choice made here and even the choice at the moment of death. As a matter of actual experience, this attitude too often leads to either despair or carelessness, the very things the teaching attempts to oppose and cure.

Vedanta does not neglect the importance of the death moment, but it teaches that you will not be able to avail yourself of that moment's full power of choice unless all your life you have been preparing for it, and also, that though the moment of death decides the course of the soul, maybe for an immense period, yet nothing is irrevocable but the final end of the story—to which all must come sooner or later—union with the One.

This doctrine then is neither slack nor does it make an offence against the moral law and the conception of compassion as of the

nature of the universe. An eternal hell, whether it frightens a few people into panic behaviour or no, is one which is metaphysically, theologically impermissible. For its existence means that God has been defeated for good and all by some part of His creation. Even on the basis of providing an additional safeguard to police protection, no thinking person can entertain a proposition which is so absurd.

The other knife-edge that Vedanta seems to travel is between the opposed dangers of a doctrine of grace which removes all need for self-effort and one that teaches that there is no worker but yourself; you save yourself or no one can. This, again, of course, dates from an inadequate psychology which thought of the individual as the one irreducible and unexpandable unit of consciousness. The teaching that the wind of grace is always blowing but you must raise—and keep raised—your sail; this is the only doctrine which in East or West has ever made complete saints, men who achieved entire wholeness. It does more; it also gives the first insight into the doctrine of karma, a doctrine which we must now remember is being forced on Western man, not by religion but by genetics—that we are born with a fate which we can modify but never disregard and indeed can modify only in so far as we accept it.

If we are really all much more members and parts of each other than the Renaissance conception of individualism thought, then Vedanta is not only more scientific than the Renaissance outlook; it also offers a way of life more truthful and at the same time more practical. Human nature can be changed, once we realize what human nature is. And he who changes himself *is* actually changing others. Private salvation is a contradiction in terms. For we are saved from isolation, privacy, egotism into the One who embraces all.

Human nature—that phrase leads to two further points which appear as important definitions of Vedanta, showing how it balances between 'life rejection' and 'life acceptance', between despairing pessimism and unsubstantial optimism. Western asceticism has tended to take that aspect of mortification which regards

the body as a foul prison—this 'vile body', as the English translators rendered St. Paul's phrase—and this life as a vale of never-ceasing tears. The *Theologia Germanica*, following this tradition, says that Christ never had a moment's joy in His whole life, a remark that the Gospels would certainly seem to deny. Luther refers to the body as nothing but a sack of worms. Later Protestantism, reacting from this, whirled round and has tended to say that the body should, with rational hygiene and giving it its head as far as the appetites are concerned, become a lasting delight. Likewise the world, properly tidied, should prove a paradise.

Vedanta teaches that the body is invaluable and must most carefully be kept in health, because—and only because—it alone can be the egg in which the soul may hatch. Likewise the world, it too is the shell of that egg in which we hatch. And the farther we advance in growth the more we shall be able to see that this world appears as a heaven to him, but only to him, whose body and mind have become truly translucent. To him this experience of time and grace is as God sees it, nirvana, the state beyond all conflict and separateness.

Vedanta, then, in regard to the physical body and the temporal world, finds the true attitude and balance. This is a middle world in which we are embryos, tadpoles of eternity. Heraclitus' phrase, 'Here we are as in an egg', may be taken as a good definition of our physical condition and what we should do about it. We may define our environment in that saying of Jesus preserved for us, not by the Western canon, but by the Indian emperor Akbar when he had carved over the capital he deserted as soon as it had been built: 'Said Jesus, may his name be blessed, This world is a bridge; pass over it, but build no house upon it.'

Such then seem to be very briefly the reasons, general and personal, philosophic and empiric, for our availing ourselves of all that Vedanta can teach us, and striving to practise it. For so only may we really learn to understand ourselves and become at length mobilized for the rightful service of others. The actual terminology in which such a system of thought and action is

conveyed must always be modulated to the place and time in which it is being conveyed. Vedanta is so ancient that we can see it doing this throughout the ages. And because of this we can perceive the essential and unchanging under the topical and can now at present see that here and now by its present teachers and practisers it is growing for itself the instruments of expression and practice whereby it may speak in the vernacular of our contemporary lives to Western man.

Christopher Isherwood

IN ORDER to say what Vedanta means to me, I shall have to explain what it was that I meant by 'religion' in the days before I learned about Vedanta. To do this will be to describe a number of prejudices, some of them silly, some of them not without a certain justification, all of them held by thousands of fairly intelligent men and women in the world today.

By 'religion' I meant the Christian religion, or, more specifically, the Church of England, into which I had been received by baptism when I was a baby. Other Christian sects I had been encouraged to suspect or despise; the Catholics were traditionally 'un-English' and involved in sinister international politics, the Nonconformists were 'common' and lower-middle-class. As for the Hindus, Buddhists, and Mohammedans, they were merely picturesque heathens who wailed from minarets, spun prayer-wheels, and flung themselves under juggernauts. You couldn't count them as being 'religious' at all. Such were the attitudes I inherited as a member of an upper-class landowning Protestant family living on a small island which was, at that time, the centre of an enormous colonial empire.

Infant baptism provides dissatisfied Christians with a ready-made grudge against the Church. Why, they ask, should you be conscripted into it before you are old enough to have a will of your own? The Church's answer is to offer the ceremony of confirmation, which enables the adolescent individual to make a voluntary act of accepting his already imposed Christianity. Unfortunately, in my case, as in the case of many others, confirmation was not entirely voluntary. At my school, it was tacitly understood that you would be confirmed, and a good deal of moral

pressure was exerted to make you agree to this. You could refuse, of course—one of my best friends did—but that took considerable independence and courage. I hadn't enough of either virtue. So I agreed.

Soon after my confirmation, I began to discover that I had, as they say, 'lost my faith'; or, to be more exact, I discovered that I had never had any. By the time I was twenty, I declared myself an atheist, and I remained in that conviction for the next fifteen years. I said privately and publicly that I loathed religion; that it was evil, superstitious, reactionary nonsense; and I warmly agreed that it was indeed 'the opium of the people'. These statements were taken as a matter of course by my friends, who were, with one or two exceptions, all of the same opinion as myself. It was therefore seldom necessary for me even to discuss the subject in any detail. However, if I had done so, I should probably have argued more or less as follows.

In the first place, I hated Christianity because it was dualistic. God, high in heaven, ruled with awful justice over us, His abject and sinful subjects, here below. He was good. We were bad. We were so bad that, when He sent His Son down to live amongst us, we promptly crucified Him. For this act, committed nearly two thousand years ago, we had to beg forgiveness, generation after generation. If we begged hard enough and were sincerely sorry, we might qualify for heaven, instead of being sent to hell, where we naturally belonged.

Who wouldn't rebel against the idea of such a God? Who wouldn't denounce His tyranny? Who wouldn't protest against the utter unfairness of this test to which He had subjected us: one short earthly life in which to earn salvation or deserve damnation? Who wouldn't detest His Son, who had come to us as a sort of agent provocateur, wearing a hypocritical mask of meekness, in order to tempt us to betray Him? Such were the questions I asked myself, and my answer was that only slaves could accept such a religion. If hell existed (which I anyhow denied) then I would be proud to be damned. In hell one could expect to meet

every honest and courageous man or woman who had ever lived.

Then again, Christianity (as I saw it) seemed to consist almost entirely of 'don'ts'; everything you could possibly want to do was forbidden as a sin. My family has a Puritan background, and there is enough Puritanism in me to set up a conflict whenever the word 'sin' is mentioned. I rebelled so violently against these 'don'ts' that I regarded every sin as an act of defiance and hence almost as a virtue. I would have been apt, for example, to smoke opium *on principle* if I had been able to get any.

When I looked at the Christians around me (I knew hardly any serious ones, and none of them intimately) I wilfully saw them as a collection of dreary, canting hypocrites, missionaries of ignorance and reaction, who opposed all social reform lest it should endanger the status and privileges of their Church, and all personal freedom lest people should discover for themselves that the 'don'ts' were unnecessary. I disliked their stiff Sunday clothes and grave Sunday faces, their sickly humility, their lack of humour, their special tone when speaking of God, their selfish prayers for rain, health, and national victory in war. I assumed, quite arbitrarily, that every Christian was secretly longing to indulge in forbidden pleasures, and that he was only prevented from doing so by his cowardice, ugliness, or impotence. I delighted in stories which told of clergymen being seduced, and monks or nuns having clandestine love affairs. My venom against them knew no bounds. At the same time, I declared that I myself needed no religion to keep me moral, according to my own standards. I would try to behave properly, not because of the Ten Commandments or a fear of hell, but because I freely chose to follow the advice of my conscience.

A psychiatrist could probably tell me to what extent these exaggerated reactions were produced by a father-complex, or by certain experiences in early childhood, resulting in a dread of authority. That does not matter, as far as my present subject is concerned. For my prejudices were not merely neurotic; they had a direct relation to actual facts. There are some aspects of organized religion which I still believe to be bad. What I am trying

to show is that my view of religion, during that period of my life, was distorted and very ill-informed.

Though I called myself an atheist, I nevertheless had a religion, or a substitute for a religion—or perhaps I should say two substitutes, since my beliefs were, to some extent, contradictory. The first of them was a belief in Art. I had discovered, by this time, that I had a certain talent for writing. I believed that I should serve that talent, exercising it to the best of my ability, dedicating my life to it, and rejecting every influence and interest that threatened to interfere with it. I thought reverently of the great masters of literature, remembering how they had not feared to accept poverty, ill-health, public ridicule, even imprisonment and death, in their struggle to express their inspiration. They were my saints, and I was a humble novice, eager to imitate their example.

This monastic ideal of the artist is a fine one, if you can live up to it. Unfortunately, very few artists do. I did not. Indeed, my attitude towards my vocation was quite unusually arrogant and insincere. Merely because I had a knack of self-expression, I regarded myself as a Special Person, far above the vulgar herd; in fact, one of the Saved. I talked a lot about serving my talent, but what I really meant was that other people should serve it; if they could help me, even indirectly, in the production of my stories—well, they ought to feel honoured! I talked, also, about the necessity of accepting all experience; since experience is the raw material of art. But, in practice, I chose to accept only those experiences which were enjoyable; the 'acceptance' being an alibi for every kind of self-indulgence. As for poverty and public ridicule, I was most unwilling to face them. I privately thought that I deserved to be supported by my wealthier and less talented friends; and I was very indignant when my books got bad notices. As soon as I achieved a little success, my vanity fairly wallowed in it. By the time I was thirty, I had become a pretty hard-boiled operator in the fashionable literary racket. And, at the same time, I often felt disgusted with myself and wondered uneasily if this could really be the height of human ambition; to go on producing book after

book—just for the sake of being an author and having your name in the newspapers—until you died.

Meanwhile, I had a second belief; a belief in Social Reform. This belief contradicted the other because it involved a recognition of the equal rights of all men; whereas, as an artist, I was concerned with my special rights as an individual and definitely did not want to submit my work to the judgement of any governmental literary committee. Social Reform is a fine ideal, to which one may dedicate one's life; but, had I really done so, I should have had to give up my own kind of writing and devote myself to political journalism and propaganda. This I was unwilling to do. I was therefore only playing at being a reformer; and my second religion-substitute was as invalid as my first.

When the Spanish Civil War broke out, I joined my friends—and the vast majority of English writers—in supporting the Republican Government. It seemed to us then that the Government was absolutely in the right, and that its enemies were absolutely in the wrong. This being the case, we believed that the Government was entitled to use any means in its power to overcome these enemies. But, as the war went on, it became apparent that the situation was far more complicated than we, in our political innocence, had imagined. Certain parties within the Government were fighting for power. They stood for divergent political ideals, and, in order to achieve these ideals, they did not hesitate to slander and kill each other, thus bringing about the ruin of the Republican cause and the victory of its enemies. I began now to realize that bad means cannot ever safely be used even to accomplish good ends. And when, in 1938, as a war correspondent in China, I saw the bombing of civilians and the conscription of mere children to serve in the front-line trenches, I knew that my whole acceptance of armed force as a permissible means of social reform had been due to a lack of feeling and imagination. I would always honour those who fought for what they believed to be right, but, in future, I myself must be an openly avowed pacifist.

It was therefore in a very disturbed and confused state of mind that I came to the United States, early in 1939. I still in-

tended to practise my craft as a writer, but I could no longer justify to myself my existence as a pure, self-sufficient artist. I still believed in social reform, but I no longer believed that it justified the use of false propaganda and physical violence. I desperately needed to find some kind of meaning in life, but I had found my two former beliefs inadequate and I still entertained my violent prejudice against what I called 'religion'. And my newly discovered pacifism was too limited and negative to form a basis for living; it didn't go beyond the decision to refuse to fight, if there was a war. It was in this state of confusion that I first came into contact with the teachings of Vedanta.

To suggest that I accepted Vedanta philosophy just because it convinced me intellectually would be to claim that I am a creature of pure reason. And, of course, I am nothing of the kind. We none of us are. The really decisive convictions of our lives are never arrived at through the power of arguments alone. The right teacher must appear at exactly the right moment in the right place; and his pupil must be in the right mood to accept what he teaches. But a description of the way in which these various factors combined, in my own case, to influence me, would be too long and complicated, and too frankly autobiographical, to fit the kind of article I am writing. All I can do here is to list some of the reasons why Vedanta appealed to me—reminding the reader, at the same time, that these reasons are only reasons; they really do not explain anything.

1. Vedanta is non-dualistic. Psychologically, this was of the greatest importance to me; because of my fear and hatred of God as the father-figure. I don't think I could ever have swallowed a philosophy that *began* with dualism. Vedanta began by telling me that I was the Atman, and that the Atman was Brahman; the Godhead was my own real nature, and the real nature of all that I experienced as the external, surrounding universe. Having taught me this, it could go on to explain that this one immanent and transcendent Godhead may project all sorts of divine forms and incarnations which are, as the Gita says, its 'million faces'. To the

eyes of this world, the One appears as many. Thus explained, dualism no longer seemed repulsive to me; for I could now think of the gods as mirrors in which man could dimly see what would otherwise be quite invisible to him, the splendour of his own immortal image. By looking deeply and single-mindedly into these mirrors, you could come gradually to know your own real nature; and, when that nature, that Atman, was fully known and entered into, the mirror-gods would no longer be necessary, since the beholder would be absolutely united with his reflection. This approach to dualism via non-dualism appealed so strongly to my temperament that I soon found myself taking part enthusiastically in the cult of Sri Ramakrishna, and even going into Christian churches I happened to be passing, to kneel for a while before the altar. Obviously, I had been longing to do this for years. I was a frustrated devotee.

2. The non-dualism of Vedanta taught me a better understanding of the true function of prayer. If I am really the Atman, the Godhead, then it is obvious that my basic prayer must be for self-knowledge. I must pray to be released from the delusion that I am this Christopher Isherwood, this little transient ego-personality. I must pray to know myself. 'O, my real Self, reveal yourself to me': how can I possibly ask more—or less?

This was a novel and most inspiring idea to me, for I had always supposed that religious people limited their prayer to material petitions. You asked for worldly advantages and possessions on behalf of yourself, your neighbours, or your nation. This 'give-me' attitude seemed, and still seems to me tragically presumptuous and silly. How can we dare to suppose that we—these restricted ego-intelligences—know what we really need? Of course, I was totally wrong in thinking that all Christians prayed like this, but my misconception had at least a partial excuse. For there are many people—some of them priests and ministers—who make wholesale demands for divine intervention in their personal, business, and political affairs, omitting Christ's saving clause, 'nevertheless, not as I will but as thou wilt'.

3. Vedanta provides us with a cosmology, an account of the

workings and nature of the universe, which seems extremely reasonable and which is, in fact, largely in agreement with the findings and hypotheses of modern science. Vedanta cosmology does not pretend to explain the Absolute, but it does draw a clear line around the area of our ignorance. And its theory of karma and reincarnation is a very helpful and unsentimental approach to our problems as human beings. By assuming that we have had previous lives and that the consequences of our actions in them determine the conditions of our present birth, it saves us from the danger of blaming God for what we are and thus deciding that we are all helpless puppets.

4. However, Vedanta merely offers this cosmology as an intellectual aid to spiritual practice, not as a necessary article of faith. Vedanta is not dogmatic. Previously, I had always thought of religion in terms of dogmas, commandments, and declarative statements. The teacher expounded the truth, the dogmatic ultimatum; you, the pupil, had only to accept it in its entirety. (Your sole alternative was to reject it altogether.) But Vedanta made me understand, for the first time, that a practical, working religion is experimental and empirical. You are always on your own, finding things out for yourself in your individual way. Vedanta starts you off with a single proposition, which is no more than a working hypothesis. 'The Atman can be known. We say so, on the basis of the past experience of others. But we don't ask you to believe that. We don't want you to believe anything. All we ask is that you make a serious effort to get some spiritual experience for yourself, using the techniques of meditation which we shall teach you. If, after a reasonable period of time, you have found nothing, then never mind Ramakrishna, never mind Christ, never mind anybody; you are entitled to say boldly that our teaching is a lie, and we shall respect you for saying so. We have no use for blind believers.' Who could decline such a challenge? 'This,' I said to myself, 'is what religion is really all about. Religion isn't a course of passive indoctrination; it is an active search for awareness. Why didn't somebody ever tell me so before?' The question was, of course, absurdly unfair. I had been 'told' this innumerable

times. Every moment of my conscious existence had contained within itself this riddle—'What is life for?'—and its answer: 'To learn what life means.' Every event, every encounter, every person and object I had met, had restated question and answer in some new way. Only I hadn't been ready to listen. Now, as I came to learn something about practical mysticism, I was greatly astonished to find how closely the recorded experiences of Hindu and Christian (not to mention Buddhist and Taoist, Sufi and Jewish) mystics are inter-related. And thus another group of my anti-Christian prejudices was liquidated, along with my ignorance.

5. Vedanta does not emphasize the vileness of man's mortal nature or the enormity of sin. It dwells, rather, on the greatness of man's eternal nature, and refuses to dignify sin by allowing it too much dramatic value. Vivekananda warns us not to think of ourselves as sinners; such seeming humility can easily degenerate into masochism. We shall do better to remind ourselves continually of what is godlike in man, and try to be worthy of that. As for our sins, we shall not atone for them by sentimental orgies of contrition. What we have to understand is simply this: every act has consequences, good or bad or mixed, and we are paid for everything we think or say or do with an absolute, automatic fairness, neither too much nor too little. If we persist in performing acts which strengthen the ego-sense (i.e. sins) then we shall find that we are becoming increasingly alienated from knowledge of the Atman within us. Maybe we imagine we want to perform such acts? Maybe we think we would rather live in ignorance of the Atman? Very well, we are at liberty to try it. The will is free. The wheel of rebirth will not cease to revolve; and if we demand another thousand or ten thousand lives of human experience, it will provide them. In the end we shall learn better, we shall know what we really want; and when we know, when we turn towards the Atman, we shall find it, as always, there. And there will be nobody but ourselves to blame for all the delay.

This is the message of Vedanta as Vivekananda preaches it. Like many others before me, I heard it with an almost incredulous

joy. Here, at last, was a man who believed in God and yet dared to condemn the indecent grovelling of the sin-obsessed Puritans I had so much despised in my youth. I loved him at once, for his bracing self-reliance, his humour, and his courage. He appealed to me as the perfect anti-Puritan hero: the enemy of Sunday religion, the destroyer of Sunday gloom, the shocker of prudes, the breaker of traditions, the outrager of conventions, the comedian who taught the deepest truths in idiotic jokes and frightful puns. That humour had its place in religion, that it could actually be a mode of spiritual self-expression, was a revelation to me; for, like every small boy of Puritan upbringing, I had always longed to laugh out loud and make improper noises in church. I didn't know, then, that humour has also had its exponents in the Christian tradition. I knew nothing, for example, about St. Philip Neri.

Speaking of Vivekananda brings me to mention three more or less incidental considerations which, nevertheless, played an important part in my acceptance of Vedanta. They may sound somewhat trivial, to the intelligent reader. I must remind him that my attitude towards religion at that time was not only unintelligent but very naïve.

First, I found Vedanta all the more reassuring because its latest great exemplars—Ramakrishna himself, and Vivekananda, Brahmananda, and their brother disciples—had lived so recently. The figures of the major Christian saints, not to mention that of the historic Jesus of Nazareth, are all somewhat dimmed by the passage of time. But Ramakrishna died only eighteen years before I was born; I have met three people who knew Vivekananda; and Brahmananda was the guru of my own guru. These are not remote inhabitants of another epoch, but still-living, vivid presences. Photographs of them exist. Records of their sayings and doings are detailed and reliable. You can easily imagine what it would have been like to encounter them as human beings. And, for this reason alone, the guarantee which their lives offer of the truth of Vedanta is singularly impressive. Imagining what it would



mean, to a Christian to know so much about—let us say—St. Francis of Assisi!

Secondly, Vedanta—or rather, the Vedanta society of America—attracted me because it was a small movement, without great wealth or the slightest pretensions to political influence. My horror and contempt for the political manoeuvres of the leading Christian churches was very strong at that time, and it has not lessened since. No amount of argument will ever convince me that interference in politics by religious bodies is anything but evil. If, at some future date, the Vedanta societies become thus involved, then they will have betrayed Ramakrishna, just as the churches have, in this respect, betrayed Christ. 'My kingdom is not of this world' is said, or implied, by all true spiritual prophets. Meanwhile, it is, at least, a hopeful indication of future policy that the Ramakrishna Order of India, which is certainly neither poor nor lacking in influence, refused to support Gandhi's non-co-operation movement, despite its sympathy for his cause.

Thirdly, I liked Vedanta because it talked Sanskrit. By this I do not mean that I am a lover of the obscure and exotic; quite the reverse. But I was suffering, at the period of my first acquaintance with Vedanta, from a semantic block against the words which were associated with my Christian upbringing: God, saviour, comforter, soul, heaven, redemption, love, salvation, etc., etc. To some of these, indeed, my reaction was so violent that I would wince and clench my fists whenever they were uttered. I could only approach the subject of mystical religion with the aid of a brand-new vocabulary. Sanskrit supplied it. Here were a lot of new words, exact, antiseptic, uncontaminated by use in bishops' sermons, schoolmasters' lectures, politicians' speeches. To have gone back along the old tracks, to have picked up the old phrases and scraped them clean of their associations—that job would have been too disgusting for a beginner. But now it wasn't necessary. Every idea could be made over, restated in the new language. And restatement was what I most needed; as a mental discipline and even as an alibi, since it was embarrassing to admit to myself that I had been so intolerant.

I have written all this; and yet I have really said nothing. I have failed to explain what Vedanta means to me. I must repeat: reasons are only reasons. They merely form a kind of structure around that more or less indescribable element—our personal experience.

So I can start all over again and answer the title-question with two words. What does Vedanta mean to me? *Guru* and *mantram*.

Religion, as I have already suggested, is not taught but caught. Not taught by one intelligence to another intelligence, but caught through the influence of one personality upon another personality. That has been my own experience. In the midst of all the verbal teaching and philosophizing, it now seems, this other kind of non-verbal teaching was going on, without my being aware of it. The guru, the teacher, transmits his teaching on two different levels. It is a combination of what he says and what he is.

The mantram, the sequence of prayer-words which the guru gives individually to each disciple at the time of his initiation—that is a combination, also. It is made of words and yet it is beyond words. It does not verbally summarize the guru's teaching and yet it *is*, essentially, his teaching—the whole of it. You come to feel this, the more you repeat your mantram and the more you rely upon it to bring you through the crises of your life.

I don't even begin to understand the workings of this twofold process. I only know that, as far as I am concerned, the guru-disciple relationship is at the centre of everything that religion means to me. It is the one reality of which I am never in doubt, the one guarantee that I shall ultimately surmount my own weakness and find knowledge of eternal peace and joy. If, having known this relationship, I could in some terrible way be deprived of it again, then my life would become a nightmare of guilt, boredom and self-disgust. Personally, I do not worry much about this, because I do not believe that the guru can ever abandon his disciples, even if he should want to do so. I believe that their relationship survives death, accident, even betrayal. I believe, for example, that Christ cannot disown even Judas.

John van Druten

IF VEDANTA is in itself a religion, or a statement of religious principles, it is also an embracement of all religions, of all religious principles. The statement is made in the widest of all possible terms. It can catch and hold members of any religion whose code is not so strict that it will not allow them to look in any other direction, or to accept the fact that there are other manifestations of faith besides its own. Unfortunately, that is true of most religions. But to those, too, Vedanta holds out its arms.

I think that this, to me, is the greatest significance of Vedanta: its all-embracingness, and its assertion that all religions are paths, some more and some less direct, to the same end. It knows, too, that whether they recognize the fact or not, everyone in the world is pointed to the same goal. It knows that the saint and the criminal, the philanthropist and the miser, the celibate and the philanderer, are after the same thing, and that that is peace of soul. It knows they are looking in totally different directions, and it knows, too, that some of the directions are wrong (as the Christian religion knows that the same ones are wrong), but it declines to call the wrong ones 'sin', to debase them and their pursuers as wicked, but contents itself with calling them ignorance, and their followers men who, from ignorance, are going in the wrong direction. It knows, too, that these people will come back and start another and righter road—not as a deliberately imposed punishment, a form of retributive hell—but as a lost man, with only one determination and destination, must eventually retrace his steps and start again.

I have outlined before in several places my own path to any

form of religious experience. It was totally absent from my childhood, when I was guided by parents who were, as I see them now, essentially fine and good people on a wholly ethical basis. But if ethics are regarded as a form of absence of religion, an almost deliberate absence—a relationship between man and man, as distinguished from the relationship between man and God—I am reminded now of Emerson's remark when he said: 'We grant that human life is mean, but who taught us that it was mean?' From childhood into later adolescence and well into young manhood, my lack of religious belief turned into a cynical and almost sneering kind of materiality, a belief in meaninglessness.

And then, through what seemed like a series of accidents, I began to turn. There was pacifism; there was a physical accident to me which sent me ultimately to Christian Science, even though I turned to it almost entirely as a form of magic which might, I had been persuaded to believe, heal broken bones for me. (I still believe that it could have done so, but not in the way or on the basis that I then thought that it might.) And then I read a book by Gerald Heard. It was called *The Third Morality*, and I can well see the day that I sat by a California swimming pool and absorbed its contents and its philosophy. Its opening chapters clarified its message to me very simply. As I now remember it, it was somewhat as follows. Once, in human form, God had been everywhere and in everything. Three men had come in turn, and had chased God from his hiding places. Newton, with his discovery of the laws of gravitation, had removed God from the physical universe, replacing him by material rules. Darwin had removed God from the sphere of living development, with the laws of natural selection and survival of the fittest replacing him. Lastly, God remained in the human brain or consciousness, from which he was expelled by Freud and other psychoanalysts with their rules and hypotheses. There was no God any more, because there was no place for him. That was one of the ways in which the philosophy of meaninglessness was born.

From there, Mr. Heard, as I remember his work, went on to show the utter failure of that philosophy, and the quagmire of

despair and futility to which it had led its believers. The remainder of the book was an attempt to reinstate God in a newer form everywhere, to see man as God's vicegerent, capable of making any kind of world up to the standard of which he was able to live. It gave man all of God's powers, instead of reducing God to an external figure who might or might not bestow them, according to a number of prejudices and predilections. It suggested a rationed life, a controlled life, a life based on that power and the need to realize it. It contained, as I now remember it, no reference to any form of religion or to any religious exercises; it was a rational approach (provided one was willing to believe in God at all, and from my Christian Science teachings I was at that moment ready to). It started me on what I hope and believe to be the right road.

From then on I made other discoveries and other acquaintances. It took a long while to find and to be able to appreciate Vedanta. It had had, for me, the scars of being a ritualistic Oriental religion, full of Sanskrit words. These deterred me as a kind of exotic mumbo-jumbo, as they seem to have attracted Mr. Isherwood by their lack of empty Christian pious phraseology. It had spelled a total renunciation of everything that I had thought meant life. I did not see this then as being the same thing as the virtue of non-attachment, which Aldous Huxley had made clear as an essential to me. And lastly, it believed in reincarnation, a doctrine which had always repelled me. Quite why, I do not know. It suggested quips from Shakespeare about 'the soul of my grandam inhabiting a bird', which—remembering my own grandmother—seemed ridiculous, and it evoked too, pictures of people who remembered (or said they did) prior incarnations as queens or Babylonian slaves. None of this seemed to me reasonable. It all had a phoney ring to it.

But I moved from a rigorous and old-fashioned Christian Science to a wider interpretation, which managed to stretch the bounds of my intellectual appreciation to something larger, more subjective, more in line with my own appreciation of poetry and the things that went beyond either words or thought, being

apprehended in another section of myself from the brain and the intellect. This was the same section from which, for example, one fell in love, or believed in abstract truth, goodness, and reverence. It restrained, too, a tendency to believe in miracles as a form of unpredictable magic (or, worse still, of predictable and achievable magic); it opened up another side of life and faith to me, and it began to take care of that old problem of what life, and the purpose of living, was all about. It made that seem not quite such a silly, because unanswerable, question.

I had bad times—one very bad time, indeed—and yet I think now that each of those bad times strengthened both my need and my response to a religious interpretation of life. I learned more about the technique of meditation, the opening up of oneself to another voice, rather than a deliberate analysis from the brain of the truths of religion. I saw the quotations from the Christian Scriptures as having a new meaning, and a new basis to rely on, that was not something outside myself that I had to turn to, appeal to, and coerce, but that was there as the ultimate groundwork of myself. I began to realize the falsity of the conception of two worlds, the material and the spiritual, with some obscure form of communication between them, and to see them as one, misconceived as two. I lost my fear of the word God, and grew to be able to see Atman and Brahman as meaning the same thing as it. I read the life of Sri Ramakrishna, and the flaming, utterly modern and Western teachings of his posthumous prophet, Vivekananda, who was the first saint with whom I felt I could ever have established any kind of personal relationship. And I found a new need for reverence and devotion that was not devotion to an outside deity, but to the spirit that I was composed of—to that which was, which is, and which always will be.

I found myself, too, striving now to reach beyond the lesser confines of Vedanta to the strictest advaitism, which in the end was all that could satisfy me as being all-embracing, even though there were temples of reverence to what seemed, temporarily still, like a personal form of God, for replenishment and rest upon the

way there. And lastly, I met several of the Vedanta swamis, and knew from a moment's listening or conversation that there, in their eyes and spirit, was real goodness like a light. I knew that these were men who had known and seen something that, whether or not I myself could ever know it as they had, was proved true and miraculous by the radiance that shone from them.

I could even turn back now to Christianity, and find so much more there than I had ever suspected of existing. I still could not, cannot, accept the orthodox Christian Church with its exclusiveness, its rigid certainty that it is the only valid religion, so that there is room for no other expression but its own. How can God, who is ultimately and perpetually universal, have expressed Himself once, and once only? I knew that God must express Himself all the time and in every way, and that there is no religious form or experience that is not, in its own deepest sense, valid as an expression of the true Godhead.

This, then, to return to my beginning, is what Vedanta has meant to me—this complete embracement of religion and its experiences: its perennial, because eternal, philosophy of the perpetual spirit. The spirit must be able to appear in all forms, because all forms are a part of the human and illusory manifestation of something without form, because it is beyond all form. And the realization of that truth—not by me, but by the removal of my conception of me, even as a straining, seeking human being—is all that I am ultimately concerned with. It is to that realization that I must live out the remainder of all my lives, which I now know must be as many as are needed to complete it. And this must go on until the moment when I pass even the remembrance of them, grounded in a truth, wholly blending and without either beginning or end, that makes those lives completely non-existent, save as an imaginary illusion of the ignorance of what I really am.

Marianna Masin

STARTING out from a dreamy, happy home in a small town under the Carpathian Mountains in Central Europe, the course leads in childhood into a world full of unknown mysteries. Nature still throbbing with consciousness, we make our way into the sphere of the grown-ups, with their un-understandable standards of life. Are we not all seekers after the great mystery from our infancy? In the teens there is that deep belief that life is something tremendous, where the most unbelievable events are to be found waiting for you—a life surely superior to that which 'normal' people seem to live. Just to be able to live quickly and intensely in order to know. . . .

How vast seems the world of knowledge and science which opens up before the eighteen-year-old. If we could but know enough, there was a solution to be had for everything; there could be knowledge of the universe and its laws. The macrocosm and the subtle laws of matter—how absorbing! Physical chemistry, then reaching the height of its glory in the concepts of Niels Bohr and Louis de Broglie and unveiling the secrets of nature! How tremendous to see the symmetry, subtle beauty, and hidden life of matter in its spinning dance. You gazed with fascinated eyes and heart into the never-ending wonders of it. Here was the key to the mystery of the universe—if you could get hold of it.

But there were shadows lurking over the new security about the world and its lawfulness: Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty; the effect of the position of the observer which influences the observed. Once more the secrets of nature slipping out of your hands. . . .

Religion? Born in a very liberal Jewish home, we lived in the

part of the country where worship of God was bound by the most orthodox customs. But we mixed freely with every other faith. I was deeply impressed by my mother's innate piety of spirit, which was much broader than orthodox religion could be. I was fascinated, too, by everything which represented the remnants of living mystic faith. Our region was populated by the most poor and most believing folk. There daily—in spite of starvation and hard work—hearts turned to Him in utter dependence, and the old Aramaic prayer ascended from the huts when the dusk fell on earth:

I start my sweetest song for Thee
And on the waves of my song my soul rises,
Longing for Thee. . . .
Take it, O Lord,
For it will gain its true shape
In the palm of Thy hand
And will know all Thy secrets.

Their prayer reached the Lord. But how? I could never cross the barrier and meet them—there was too great a distance between the different communities. Much later, after I had left my home for ever, I understood their way.

I loved the services and intense spiritual fervour of the ritual, although not understanding the real meaning of it. I was equally attracted by the Russian Orthodox churches and their beautiful Easter celebrations. But I was far from finding satisfaction in any of these; the approach to them was closed, and I did not like the creed that was taught officially.

At twenty, while studying medicine, we were impressed by translations from the Buddhist Pali Canon containing the glowing ideal of renunciation—of going above the mere appearance of things, with the possibility of overcoming the thirst for life. Surely it was a path. But the key question, 'What is the purpose and meaning of life?' remained.

The clouds of war were gathering. We had to get facts more convincing than any theoretical book knowledge could teach us.

In that time of growing chaos we came across translations of the Bhagavad-Gita and Vivekananda's works, and our interest became focused on the ancient wisdom of India. Still we could visit temples and churches in our ancient city of Prague, alive with the spirit of a thousand-year-old-tradition.

The nightmare of the long war years began with disasters disrupting completely all our concepts of universal order. Outcasts from society, we used to spend the hours of our leisure time in cemeteries. Those peaceful islands of baroque and rococo graves, where the pompous marble could not hide the vanity of vanities, were the places of our recollections. But the Lord of mercy and justice did not answer our prayers; no ray of hope came out of the darkness. Where was the wonderful harmony perceived in youth? 'Round and round, with the spectacles of delusion on his eyes, goes the fool through the labyrinth of this world, not knowing that the only peace and security are in the shrine of his own heart'—*Comenius*. You turn round and round, before at last you find the way. . . .

Organized religion could give no answer, I was sure. In longing and despair I turned to one who was known as a mystic. He belonged to the old Cabalistic tradition and as a physician he took care of the poor. Exceptionally—as it was his day of fasting, prayer, and silence—he received me kindly and listened to my request to find a real meaning in religion. Then, looking at me out of his deep eyes, he uttered this advice: 'Wait.' The same day I was introduced into the circle of his students where one girl, in an ecstatic mood, was with deep inspiration expounding a passage about Jacob's ascent to God. I was touched by the atmosphere and the religious fervour of these people; but in my heart I felt that their way was not mine.

Just in the last year of the war period one of our friends lent me a copy of Romain Rolland's *Prophets of the New India*. How strange and impressive was the concept of God as Divine Mother!

When the war was over we emerged out of the catastrophe

with body, mind, and spirit broken, with a feeble hope of creating a new universe out of ruins. There was one way to forget as quickly as possible; we set out to conclude our medical studies, wiping out memories by heaps of book knowledge and trying to be somehow again 'normal'.

Embarked on the career of a physician, we felt that despite the links of trust to fellow man which had been broken for ever, there was still something which was worth while doing. In the difficult postwar period, when the scarcity of medicines and trained aid was so serious, the fight against disease and indolence—equipped as we were with such limited knowledge ourselves—seemed hopeless. Soon we realized that this battle was not ours. The old doubts, search, and inquiry became strong again, so that the fulfilled economic and social status could give us no satisfaction.

We had a few friends—Quakers—who lived uncompromisingly their religious ideals, and we wondered if their path would be the way for us.

We left the country, carrying with us a few books. There was Mukerji's *The Face of Silence* and several volumes of Huxley, written during the war and full of 'Vedantic thoughts'. We realized we were on the right track. And sure enough, after a few weeks, in a bookshop in our new home of Venezuela, there it was in the window: *Vedanta for the Western World*.

Reading it, I remember clearly saying: 'Finally and at last this is an answer to all our questions and anxious hopes; it gives promise of a new meaning and understanding.' We wrote to the Centre in Hollywood, and after that our thoughts centred around the newly discovered treasures of *The Eternal Companion*, the Upanishads, the Gita, and the Gospel of Ramakrishna.

We felt close to the enchanting play of God on earth: the gardens were still full of the scent of flowers which He plucked for the worship of his eternal blissful Mother; the leaves still trembled with His presence; and the air was joyful with the laughter of His beloved disciples. We were still so near to all this.

What was so appealing to me was the oral tradition by which

the teachings are handed down through a succession of illumined teachers. The lineage of Sri Ramakrishna through Swami Brahmananda was still there—and accessible. Books became tiresome; the need to find a teacher and spiritual director became strongly evident. And so one day we arrived in Hollywood and, map in hand, climbed up the hill on Ivar Avenue (now Vedanta Place), our hearts beating loudly. . . .

What does Vedanta mean to me?

First of all, it means at last peace of mind and heart, integration, and a new understanding of life and its complexities. The new co-ordinates broaden the view. The sore problem of good and evil opens up; the order of the universe is restored: life and death, creation and dissolution are the inseparable parts of the one Reality. The inquiry of reason is satisfied. Where the powerful scientific tools fail, where the *Ding an sich* cannot be known, where the intellect locks our vision, there the way of super-intellectual knowledge—of direct perception—breaks down the barrier between the seer and the seen, into unity. Life itself is teaching and helping you towards this ultimate knowledge. Maya becomes the scene of His play, if you can stand aside and watch desirelessly even for a while.

The cosmological concept of Vedanta tallies with the up-to-date concepts of science. Creation—without beginning and end—oscillates between the states of equilibrium and action. Consciousness? Is there a divided one, an inner and an outer? Science, in its most recent approach, assumes that there is but one. It humbly admits that there is something like 'consciousness', which cannot be located materially in the brain and which is immutable. And our 'daily consciousness'—our personality and ego? A something arising constantly through the interaction of the grey matter of our brain with the universe, and ever changing.

The human mind is the only one which can think in symbols, in language. But this great power becomes at the same time our great limitation. We cannot grasp the whole, the unexpressed, the unity of things, the unity of ourselves. Yet only as human beings

—having evolved the ‘organic consciousness’ of our animal predecessors to its highest level—are we able to transcend our own limitations and become what we have never ceased to be—unlimited Spirit.

Vedanta’s approach to the practice of attaining this goal seemed to me unique. With the broadest outlook, it uses every means of which the mind is capable, to bring you near to that destination. Worship, ritual, prayer, meditation; everyone is led the right way, according to his temperament. Finally there is the monism of advaita Vedanta, whose profundity human mind is barely capable of conceiving.

The universality of Sri Ramakrishna’s teaching is unprecedented. Out of direct experience he declared all religions to be but different paths to God; out of his innermost knowledge he felt the unity of all beings. He gave to the world the precious doctrine: Serve God in man; this alone can bring love and peace on earth. The broadness of his teaching is unparalleled. He summed up the religious experiences treasured from time immemorial by saints and realized souls.

What appealed to me so much was the stress on non-historicity. God has come down as man again and again, to show man how to ascend to God—not by elaborate mysteries, but by a direct approach; not after death, but here and now.

Vedanta teaches that religion is being and becoming—a complete transformation of personality. You cannot get away with anything; you have to change to the core of the heart. The ideals are uncompromising. The practical teachings for the daily life can be fused with the highest flight of metaphysical thought: He is the inner ruler, the hidden Self of our being; He is the Beloved, eternally sought after in His divine form; and He is also the Absolute, without limitation. In Him all contradictions meet. Heart, reason, spirit find there their supreme satisfaction.

Vedanta opens for you the understanding of every religion. You look back to the faith you started from to realize that it spoke much the same language. The Masters of the Divine Name of the old Jewish mystical tradition realized God through direct

immediate experience, and they believed that the soul has to come back unless it attains union with God. The mystics of all religions had the identical supreme vision; human mind has conceived of the highest truth in parallel ways. Vedanta gives a common background for understanding them and for approaching their wonderful diversity of expression.

Another thing I appreciated is that in Vedanta the oral transmission of religion is emphasized. So was it in the old Jewish mystical tradition and in Christianity. When first hearing the classes in Hollywood I was struck by the simplicity of the talks given. This must be how Meister Eckhart conveyed the deepest spiritual truths to his listeners. But behind the simplicity of expression stands the depth of experience. Herein is the power in oral transmission. The Hindus aptly call God Sahaja—the simple one. One cannot understand God unless one becomes simple—that is, pure in heart. The personality of the teacher? It cannot be discussed. I am reminded of an ancient Jewish tale of how two disciples met and one asked the other about his spiritual teacher. Upon being pressed very hard, finally the second aspirant tore open his coat and exclaimed, pointing to his heart: ‘That is all I can say about him.’

I admired the broadness of the Vedantic viewpoint. It is the Eternal Gospel of all religions, transmitted to you. The most admirable of all human thoughts are brought to you intimately: The nature of this universe is blissful; you are an heir to it; it is your birthright; you are Spirit infinite—just realize it. It takes time and more time to assimilate the grandeur of the concept: Atman and Brahman are one; the individual Self and the universal Self are identical.

The spirit of the Upanishadic teachings is joyful. So is the approach to God. You have to have a light spirit and a happy heart in order to be able to serve God with right devotion. . . .

Your sense of inner freedom grows. There is finally something which nobody can take away from you; this one treasure is your own. And at the same time you know that this is the common ground in every human heart. And you can look with sympathy

and understanding on all expressions of the human spirit in the attempt to realize God.

Coming to Vedanta, you do not become a Hindu. You do not go back to the religion you started with, either. You are born in Spirit and you are given the chance to live religion and to fulfil the only and final vocation of your human existence.

J. Crawford Lewis

WHEN I first fully realized that my daughter, then a young high-school teacher, had resolutely accepted Vedanta as her religion, my mind became rather disturbed. Feelings of indifference and unconcern, which I had had before this disclosure, gave way to doubt and anxiety, and I must admit that at times I became quite unhappy.

Why had this, after other misfortunes, particularly one to which I had hardly yet begun to reconcile myself, to happen to me? Why had my only child, who was closer to me than ever (and I to her), chosen a religion about which I knew almost nothing and which the Western world usually associates with magic or some kind of mysterious control of the secret forces of nature?

I had received warning signals for several years prior to this somewhat sudden revelation, and some of them must have been quite obvious, but for some reason they did not 'sink in'. I had shrugged them off, thinking that here was just another of those short-lived notions or fancies peculiar to high-school girls of her age and that it would soon pass away.

Yoga, to me, had always suggested sleight-of-hand tricks, self-inflicted torture, and idols with four arms and two heads. I was certain that as my daughter became older she would recognize the fallacy of such a belief and would forget about it. However, these first impressions of yoga were not all bad, as she would occasionally tell me a little about it, and I could see that it had some merit.

Her mother and I had always wanted her to believe in God and the teachings of Christ. We had tried to set a good example for her to follow but had always believed that parents can easily go

too far in planning their children's lives. Of course we watched her closely. We felt that she should learn to think for herself and stand on her own two feet, but, still, we wanted to be there for her to lean on occasionally. We wanted her to develop into a broad-minded young lady with high ideals, with ideas of her own, and with the conviction and force to carry them through. She seemed to be acquiring these qualities, and it made us happy. She also appeared to have an unusually sharp mind and was manifesting a breadth of vision which is often more or less lacking in otherwise excellent minds. Power is often wasted in a ship which cannot run on an even keel.

A person with these qualities, though young, would soon see that it is not wise to accept such a religion and it would 'die a natural death'. But it did not die a natural death. I suddenly became aware that it was here to stay at least for some time, and that henceforth it would occupy an important place in both our lives. I now had a major problem to deal with, one which might well call for considerable tact, judgement, and fair play. Here was an issue of vital importance to both of us, one which might easily change the course of our lives, particularly of my daughter's.

I was afraid that she might even be considering monastic life. Of course, in the role of the fond parent I had always had other ideas as to the kind of career I hoped she would have. I must confess that religion, especially one of such an apparently doubtful nature, was not high on the list. I wanted her to get the greatest possible happiness from life and thought that religion as a career might not make this possible. Marriage and children seemed normal and fine, but if the right man did not come along, she probably would be as happy making one of several professions her life's work. She had the necessary mind, personality, determination, and health, and I was sure that she would be successful.

My 'hands-off' policy, plus my confidence in her and the wish to play fair, prompted me to proceed cautiously. Of course she and I were being watched and criticized by others. Some people

thought that I was indifferent as to the happiness and welfare of my daughter, but this did not lead me to interfere.

Since some hope that she might change her mind still lingered in me, I asked my daughter one day if she were as interested as ever in yoga, and she replied, 'Yes, and I'm going to be a yogi, and I'll never quit.'

At times after this she told me more about Vedanta, how yogis believe that man is divine and can realize that divinity in this life if they act according to the precepts and practices as laid down in the Upanishads and other Hindu scriptures and ask a qualified guru to guide and instruct them.

I now decided to do a little studying and investigating which otherwise I probably would never have gone to the trouble to do. So I asked her for a book or two, and, as the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna was handy, I started reading it and probably would have succumbed to the barriers built of unfamiliar names, words, and phrases, if I had not discovered a beautiful story of a great man who, because of his faith in his God and his love for this God, had purified himself by living a life of renunciation and had attained a state of ecstasy called by the Vedantists, samadhi.

I liked this book and was not adverse to reading more about this religion which, I discovered afterwards, often plays the part of the suspected being sentenced without a trial. So I read more books including translations of the Upanishads, the Bhagavad-Gita, and also numerous essays by Swami Vivekananda and others.

I caught myself getting to bed a little later than usual, and the time came when I knew that I was no longer reading only because of my original reason but because I was becoming interested in this oldest of all religions known to mankind.

Possibly one of the major reasons for this increasing interest was my own diagnosis of life. It seemed very unsatisfactory to me, and I had always felt that 'this cannot be all' but that there must be something else much finer and more completely satisfying.

Birth brings death, death brings rebirth:
This evil needs no proof.
Where then, O Man, is thy happiness?
This life trembles in the balance
Like water on a lotus-leaf.

Now I am growing old, and I realize that young people think that I shall soon be gone but that they will live for ever. They are mistaken, for they, too, will soon be gone, and, if they escape the hazards of life long enough to outlive me, those few extra years are as of nothing. A friend once told me, after she had lost her little girl, that if people only knew what was ahead of them, they would be unable to put one foot in front of the other.

Robert Louis Stevenson truthfully says in his 'Aes Triplex' (triple-plated brass) that because of a lack of imagination people live happily on the side of a threatening volcano and that a man in his eighties will go to bed at night with no anticipation of death which may come before he awakes.

This lack of vision must be a provision of nature, for, if man had a true conception of the future miseries of life, he would live in such a state of unhappy anticipation that survival of the race would be impossible.

I had always hoped to find a God and a religion that I could honestly accept, as the person is very foolish who fails to realize that to find God is infinitely more than the combined wealth of all nations for all time. In fact, there is nothing on this earth by which faith in God can be measured.

Here in Vedanta appeared to be a God that might be accepted by people who, knowing the limitations of the human mind, could not accept a God conceived through mere human imagination. To a person who has neither experienced God nor contacted some great soul who has, such an imaginative God could very easily appear to be but a mere personification of worldly virtues.

No intelligent person who has given the matter much thought can doubt that great characters of different religions have had mystic experiences which make them indescribably happy and

that these experiences are beyond human comprehension. And anyone who has been in the presence of a qualified guru for any length of time knows that his purity of mind is irreproachable.

Here was something which seemed to have a more concrete or tangible aspect in no way conflicting with the intuitive faith which stimulates the love of God and the religious consciousness. Here might be the proof which the seeker of truth could not pass by without feeling that if he did so he might suffer a great loss.

My mind had undergone another change and what at first had been but a mild interest in Vedanta had changed to deep admiration. What could be finer than for each of us to believe that God is within him and that the realization of this divinity is possible in this life? What is more noble than the process of character purification which calls for the control of the human emotions and the renouncing of earthly pleasures and desires? What is more commendable than many hours of meditation and prayer and the eagerness to do as the guru says? Here is no easy sentimentality or emotional indulgence so prevalent in congregations of many great churches, but instead a real devotion with all of the determination and conviction which go with it.

I am glad that I did not strongly oppose my daughter in her new religion. She would not have dropped it anyway, and I would only have confused the situation. Also, any repression might have injured her personality.

As it is, she has found something which will make her very happy, possibly blissfully happy, and she has gone into it with an honesty and tolerance which are not only characteristic of her but also of her chosen religion.

She has diverted her energies from things which offer a goal hardly worth striving for to something which offers a goal of inestimable value.

My greatest hope is that during her lifetime she will find the door leading to Brahman and that, when it closes behind her, she will leave the miseries of this earth and beyond it will find eternal peace and happiness.

Dorothy F. Mercer

I WAS born into the Vedanta. No searching brought me to it. No disillusionment with other faiths, with man, or with my own particular position in time or place. I was never a materialist nor did I ever go through the agony of losing my religion.

Until I reached a questionable maturity, the world to me consisted of three kinds of people: men, women, and swamis. The men and women had desires and ambitions like me. The swamis were without either; they sprang full-grown. They taught me Vedanta philosophy, and were themselves, quite naturally I thought, embodiments of it.

Some time before I was born, my mother and father heard Swami Vivekananda speak in San Francisco. My mother's enthusiasm was not peculiar, for Vivekananda's lectures and tour across the continent were triumphant. I can remember hearing about one of her friends addressing Vivekananda with envious admiration, 'India must be a *wonderful* country.'

'Madam,' flatly retorted India's great representative, 'all Hindus are not like me.'

My mother's subsequently taking lessons from Swami Trigunatita, who had come to San Francisco in 1903, was not surprising. She had heard Vivekananda; she was enamoured of the Vedanta-influenced Ralph Waldo Emerson; and she had been without ardour interested in the neo-Emersonian movement called New Thought.

One of my father's numerous cousins thrice removed had given up her solid, militant, and generations-old Presbyterianism to become a Vedantist. 'The Easterners' (my mother's name for my father's Pennsylvania-bred family) were taken aback. With a

long and stalwart line of American ministers, missionaries, and schoolmasters, the Presbyterian family stronghold never understood the iconoclasm.

My mother's family, on the other hand, had long since given up denominational religion. Ostensibly Protestant, they, like many San Franciscans of the time, were not so much anti-religious as without interest in religion. A worldly, cultivated people, religion would have been a supernumerary for them socially (except for weddings and funerals), and aesthetically, economically, and politically it was unnecessary. For the most part successful businessmen, they saw no real need for God.

Even so, my mother's action in getting 'mixed up' with a Hindu was criticized—put down as another instance of her proclivity for acting strangely. Because of my father's illness and consequent inability to earn the money which marked success and the standard success imposed, my mother was already a rebel. She saw no reason for being ashamed or abashed before her relatives, and attributed her predicament to false social and money values, marriage, and the unfair burden placed on women—all of which had put her in her unenviable position. The most important light in her moral and spiritual struggle was Swami Trigunatita.

How great that light was is difficult for me to estimate. She must have been early established in meditation because as long as I can remember she retired into her room every morning from ten to eleven. Although her outward life was unrewarding, she was essentially a happy woman—as she brought to my attention a few years before she died. The only subjects of interest to her in my University work were feminism and mysticism. She was visibly exalted through reading Plotinus' *Enneads*, which I brought home one day, and said she understood them because she 'too was once admitted and entered into union . . . by ways of meditation . . . to the first and all-transcendent God'.

As soon as I was old enough, I went with her weekly from our home in Mill Valley to San Francisco, to the Hindu Temple (still standing and still in use) and Swami Trigunatita. To others,

Swami's office was cluttered up; to me it was finely ordered. There were stereopticon slides, a revolving globe of the world, Swami's resplendent watch fob, a roll-top desk piled high with papers; and no 'don't touch' admonitions. There was a round, red, stained-glass window opening on the street which, on our last visit to his office, Swami told me was a motion picture.

This was my first verbal and still unlearned lesson in the Vedanta. I can remember insisting that it was the street, not a motion picture. But I was puzzled. Swami had never, as my dear father had on occasion, via a ruse given me castor oil.

Around 1913 Swami started a community project in Concord, Contra Costa County, for devotees. Because of my father's increasingly bad health and my mother's interest in the Vedanta, it was decided that we should move to Concord. I was disconsolate. Except for the shadow of my father's health, I had been a happy child in the lovely, wooded, mountain town, playing wildly with my maternal first cousins, living a life of high fancy with the fairies and elves most certainly there if I just could find them, and imitating Greek gods and goddesses with my schoolmates.

My paternal forty-second cousins who were fond of children visited us once in a while. Their advent always brought excitement, particularly as my mother's sarcasm started heated arguments when the missionaries recounted their 'good works' in the Orient. Too, I was surrounded by loving and loved maternal aunts and uncles who were highly critical of what they considered bad notions to implant in a child's mind. Against their untimely criticism I vigorously defended, without understanding, my mother's attitude towards life and Swami Trigunatita.

Once Swami came to see us without warning. He knew we lived in Mill Valley but not precisely where. It seemed perfectly normal to me that he should find his way by mentally calling my brother's name: Emerson, my brother, was then two years old. It was fortunate that we lived only about a mile from the railway station.

Concord, comparatively, was desolate. There were no hills to climb, flowers to pick, friends to play gods and goddesses with,

or place for fairies and elves in its flat expanse. Our relatives seldom visited us; there were no heated arguments; and I felt my life was as uninteresting as the terrain. So I determined to run away from home—back to the red-wooded beauty of the Marin hills, another Rima without the incomprehensible encumbrance of the lover. Of course I knew such thoughts were naughty; I was not, therefore, unduly surprised when my mother said I would be punished if I ran away. Swami, whom I had not seen for some time, had told her what I was contemplating.

Materially, this Vedanta Brook Farm was not successful, partly because Swami Trigunatita was killed by a religious fanatic during one of his sermons in San Francisco. The last time I can remember seeing him was in our Concord cabin sitting in a rocking-chair too high for his short legs and talking to my mother about the extensive war the United States had just entered. 'Women will be in a better position as a result of it,' he told her.

A few years after Swami's death in 1914 we returned to San Francisco. Although my father's health was greatly improved, we had even less money than we had had when we moved to Concord. As a consequence, it was decided to send me to business college and then to work. Nothing could have worked out better. For I skipped high school, and whatever intellectual curiosity I had was entirely absorbed by the Vedanta and Swami Abhedananda, who came to San Francisco in 1918.

En route to India from New York, where he had been since 1897, Swami Abhedananda was urged by my mother and other old students of Swami Trigunatita to stay in San Francisco, at least for a short time. He stayed for about two and a half years, lecturing twice a week and giving a class once a week.

Swami Abhedananda was tall, handsome, austere, and of commanding presence. An eloquent, scholarly, and well-organized lecturer, he addressed hundreds every week, including many eminent San Franciscans. Even a maternal aunt and her husband went to hear him, not because they were eminent nor because they felt any religious need, but because Swami Abhedananda

was one of the finest lecturers in the Bay Area. In a social group he was quiet and reserved, taking each man's measure.

I can remember one occasion when a prominent and rightfully considered great San Francisco doctor was facetiously holding forth on the yogis' ridiculous claim to psychic power. Knowing intuitively the doctor's own psychic power, Swami Abhedananda rhetorically questioned, 'You do not go out mentally to your sleeping patients at night?'

Not only did I go to all of Abhedananda's lectures and classes, but during this period I read Swami Vivekananda assiduously. I too wanted to be a philosopher, a sannyasin no less. 'Strike off thy fetters! Bonds that bind thee down, Of shining gold. . . .'

That I had no 'shining gold' to 'strike off' did not deter me from marching right along—in imagination. In reality I was working from nine to five and unhappy.

After Swami Abhedananda left San Francisco, I decided to go to night school, save, and matriculate into the University. My early undergraduate days were miserable. I was behind my class and had neither time nor money for social life. Intellectually too I was out of step. This was the cynical late post-war era: religion was the opium of the people, the United States was the greatest show on earth, and libidos were knowingly discussed. Once, having relieved myself vociferously in a wholesale denunciation of Marx, Mencken, and Freud to the greater glory of the Vedanta, a friend, whose mother was a Vedantist, took me aside.

'I'd drop the Vedanta, if I were you. They'll think you're "queer".'

Since by this time I thought I was queer—how else could I account for my misery?—I resolved I'd say nothing more about the Vedanta.

If I were to lose my faith, I should have lost it at this time. For the next semester Swami Bodhananda spoke in San Francisco, my dearly beloved brother died, I fell in love, saw beauty, and made a scholarly discovery based on the Vedanta—in that order.

I do not know to this day why Swami Bodhananda made an

impression on me. He was not fatherly as Swami Trigunatita had been, nor had he the commanding presence of Swami Abhedananda, nor did he speak eloquently. He said nothing that I had not heard time and time again. But I was uplifted for quite a period—long enough to face my brother's death with an equanimity which astonished my mother. I had so obviously adored my brother—his light-hearted gaiety, social aplomb, handsome nonchalance which kept my girl friends at his feet—that my mother thought she had a cold-hearted daughter instead of an emotional one.

I never faced another death with the same equanimity. I think now my attitude had something to do with my brother himself. After his death when my mother could talk about it without giving way to grief, she told me that years before she had asked Swami Trigunatita what her children's destinies would be. 'Dorothy will be protected by the goddess of learning; Emerson is my child,' Swami had told her.

Then I thought nothing of Swami's prophecy; now I wonder. I wonder not only about my brother whom I frequently meet in warning dreams but also about myself. Because when Swami Trigunatita made his prediction, I was a harum-scarum child of six not paying any attention to school and living in a world of fantasy.

Love and art came to me simultaneously. I had always liked to read, mainly for the story but also, and especially in poetry, for the moral which I thought to emulate. Now—

... I too have seen
My vision of the rainbow Aureoled face
Of her whom men name Beauty: proud, austere:
Divinely fugitive, that haunts the world.

From that vision I have never been able to extricate myself, nor have I tried. I am marvellously raised and elevated by words. For that reason I enjoy teaching and doing research. Not creative, I worship through the form of appreciation enhanced as I try to impart it. Not naturally a researcher, I am nagged by wanting to

find out why love, art, and mysticism are tied up together. Who was it that said, 'Whenever I open a door, I meet Plato coming out'?

But I am not a mystic. The best I can do is to recognize one. During my junior year I took a course in the lyric and read *Leaves of Grass* because as an American I thought I should. Coming from Vivekananda to Walt Whitman I had a strange feeling: it was not only the many parallel ideas extracted from mid-nineteenth-century American-scene imagery; it was the tone and dynamic strength. Whitman is a poet; Vivekananda a prose writer. But some of Whitman's poetry could be put into prose form, and Vivekananda's prose at its best could be written as free verse. The invigorating, energizing, freeing effect is the same.

At the University was one of the West's most notable Sanskrit scholars—Arthur W. Ryder. He had small respect for Western philosophy—Plato and Kant were the only two he acknowledged—but great respect for Eastern. He himself was a follower of Sankhya rather than Vedanta; however, he was fair to the Vedanta and used to lecture on its 'splendid lift and sweep'. He had also known Swami Trigunatita and was perfectly agreeable to my using Vivekananda and Abhedananda as two authorities on the Vedanta.

Another professor, John S. P. Tatlock, worried me. He was a 'fact' man, philosophically naïve, and considered by students in literary criticism as 'difficult'. What were my relief and astonishment to find that he had known Abhedananda at Harvard and respected his judgement. (Swami Abhedananda had written me after the subject of my dissertation had been accepted: 'Walt Whitman . . . must have studied the Bhagavad Gita, for in his *Leaves of Grass*, one finds the teachings of Vedanta. . . . The "Song of Myself" is but an echo of the sayings of Krishna.')

When I went to Oxford University, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan was Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics. To my ears he was giving a course on the Vedanta. Had it not been that I was more interested in an aesthetic application of the Vedanta than in

its ethical or metaphysical aspects, I would have requested him as my tutor. For he was a great lecturer, the greatest at Oxford. Never using a note, he lectured week after week in such a thoroughly organized and fluent fashion that it seemed as though there had been no interruption between lectures. He was pleased and, I think, surprised at my saying after I met him that I had been taught the Vedanta by swamis of the Ramakrishna Order.

I was fortunate in having as my tutor the most remarkable man in the English School, Humphry House, when I returned to Oxford after World War II. He had taught for a brief period at Calcutta University and was generally unhappy about India. When I mentioned the Ramakrishna Order, however, his expression changed. 'The Ramakrishna Order? Well, that is another story. Its reputation is excellent, and it has the respect of everyone in India.'

As my work progressed from the Oxonian Collingwood, through Plato and Aristotle, and eventually to the great Christian mystic, Jacob Boehme, the old wonder of the University of California graduate days returned. I was intensely happy in my work and discovered for myself the perennial philosophy.

Theoretically, the perennial philosophy was not new to me. Swami Abhedananda at the close of each lecture had offered a prayer: 'May He who is the Father in Heaven of the Christians, Allah of the Mohammedans, Divine Mother of the Hindus, grant unto us all peace and blessing.' He had pointed parallels in Christian and Hindu Scripture, and had quoted from the Sufis. *The Washington Star* in reporting on his book *Great Saviors of the World* had said: 'These studies are scholarly and comprehensive reviews of historic fact. . . . The author's attitude is reverent towards all . . . a good study fitted to open the heart and liberalize the mind.' Too, I knew Sri Ramakrishna had experientially proved the common result of various religious disciplines, including Christian. And I had myself read extensively in the literature of mysticism. But I had never before made an intensive study of any mysticism other than the Vedanta.

Plato was a great experience for me. Although I already had

some knowledge of him as do most college students in the United States, his mysticism had never been emphasized. I can remember in my freshman year reading *The Republic* and noting Vedanta similarities; the philosophy professors were either not interested or, more likely, my exposition was not clear. (Thanks to Swami Prabhavananda, I have recently read E. J. Urwick's *The Message of Plato* which ably points the astonishing parallels.) Whether because I was reading in the English School at Oxford, or because by now I was a mature student, or because I had such an extraordinary tutor, I was encouraged to do intensive work on Plato.

I owe Jacob Boehme also to Oxford although indirectly. One of the most difficult of the Christian mystics, Boehme was for me a profound and psychologically astute teacher after I had begun to understand his alchemical terminology and to accept rather than be impatient with his repetitions and unintelligible scientific references. Too, his qualities of humility and sincerity endeared him to me: a tiny twig in God's vast vineyard, he characterizes himself; better known is the great personal sacrifice he made in standing against the vested authority of his time without fanfare.

What has Boehme or Plato to do with the Vedanta? Nothing and everything. Leaving me free, the Vedanta has held me fast. It has not bothered me with dogma; it has never said, 'Don't touch.' I can read Boehme and Plato and know their truth is the truth of the Vedanta; nay, *the* truth which sages variously name. I can join the celebrants on Corpus Christi Day at St. Paul's Outside the Gates in Rome, or listen to the choristers at King's College Chapel, Cambridge, or sit in silence with the Quakers in their bare meeting-room at Oxford. Wherever God is worshipped there He resides was too early implanted in my mind for me to have any doubts. And why should I? 'The nearest gnat is an explanation, and a drop or motion of waves a key.'

For this breadth of outlook, I owe a debt of gratitude to my mother and to the swamis of the Ramakrishna Order which can neither be adequately expressed nor adequately paid. The faith in mysticism which they gave me has, needless to say perhaps, been

a bulwark in facing emotional crises. Not so evident or so universally acknowledged is the appeal mysticism makes to the imagination.

And intellectually advaita Vedanta has stood the tangible test of two Vedanta-based dissertations: one for the B. Litt. degree at Oxford University and another for the Ph.D. degree at the University of California. I can remember the exasperation of one of my examiners faced for the first time with Shankara and his distinction between the Higher and Lower Brahman. In trying to break down one of my comments and being met at every turn with the Higher Brahman, my examiner threw up his hands: 'This Higher Brahman, I must say, is very convenient.' Although satisfying me emotionally, imaginatively, and intellectually, experientially, I am ashamed to admit, I know nothing about mysticism.

'God dwells in all things; nothing comprehends him unless it be one with him' is Boehme's statement of *Tat tvam asi*. Many great mystics have repeated this ancient 'Know Thyself'—repeated it so often as to be in danger of tediousness. But is there any mystic of stature who has not warned that reading about God is worth very little, at best a donkey's occupation?


No true lover of learning or of the beautiful, I have squandered a rich heritage which would have given me eternal nourishment rather than an occasional glimpse of a fugitive divinity. Frequently discouraged, I have more often than not lost my passion in routine, in duty, in petty ambition, petty appreciation, petty effort to conform to petty standards. A soul in travail, I have not been married to true being, nor have I had the hardihood to pursue the beautiful unconcerned with its many particulars. I have allowed myself to be 'cheated by the magic veil of shows'.

As Plato says in *The Republic* before one of his great postulations of absolute Good: "Then shall we not make a reasonable defence when we say that the true lover of learning naturally strove towards what is, and would not abide by the many particulars that are believed to be, but went forward undiscouraged, and did not cease from his passion until he grasped the nature of each reality that is, with that part of his soul which is fitted to lay hold

of such by reason of its affinity with it; whereby being near to and married with true being, and begetting reason and truth, he came to knowledge and true life and nourishment, and then, and only then, ceased from the travail of his soul.'

Why should not the small hope I have had after every fleeting glimpse of true being sustain me now in a larger hope? Can I not too be nourished? Am I not a legitimate child of the Divine Mother as Sri Ramakrishna reminded his devotees? I have hope, therefore (a good Christian virtue), that some day I shall be able to look out of the window and in place of seeing only the street's passing traffic know, as Swami Trigunatita so long ago told me, that what I am seeing is not Reality but a motion picture—TV he would probably say today, for he was not one to discount modern gadgets.

Kurt Friedrichs

 ON THE little island of Heligoland in the North Sea, where I first became conscious of the phenomenal world around me, there were only a few objects between sky and sea to which one might have become attached; and the few space-filling things were heavy, mighty, and at first seemed to me to be fortunately unalterable.

My youth among the red rocks on the island was made up of books and solitude and permitted a mysterious imaginative capacity to grow up within me, which made me completely independent of my environment and of people. As there was nobody in my little shut-off world with whom I could have shared my strange experiences—let alone a teacher with a trained intellect, or a spiritual leader—the relationships and connections with my own self remained hidden to me for many years, although the experiences themselves were none the less intense and impressive. They had only the important difference that they did not arise as a result of my own power and volition but rather rushed at me without control, and yet always left an indescribable happiness behind them.

From my earliest youth I was governed by a strange, ungrounded fear, fear of each morning to come, of every meeting with people; each new day seemed to be filled with threatening unrest, insecurity, and uncertainty. Sadness and melancholy often occupied my thoughts to such an extent that in tiredness and resignation I yearned for a never-ending sleep from which there would be no return to this horrible world. But one day there came an experience which soon in the force of its repetition was

to become much finer and more sublime than the deepest and longest sleep could be.

One afternoon at low tide on the west coast of the island, as I was climbing over the seaweed-covered rocks in order to have a rest beneath an overhanging cliff, washed out by the surf of many centuries, a spiritual ecstasy suddenly took possession of me. The waves breaking at my feet and the endless surface of water stretching away to the vanishing point all of a sudden threw me into another sphere of consciousness. I myself was surf, sea, and infinity. Time, space, body-consciousness—everything was blotted out, drawn up into an absolute consciousness of light and bliss. I have no idea of how long this condition lasted, but I felt the elation long afterwards until it slowly made room again for the fear that this experience, as an arbitrary condition brought about by chance, would never recur, and my state of mind might be worse than before in its insatiable longing for complete unity with the whole world.

And yet, beneath the same cliff wall, in the rhythm of the breaking waves and the swinging harmony of the endless sky and sea, I was again and again thrown out of my rational and bodily limitations. But however much my normal consciousness searched and rationalized, it could not explain this condition of transformation, and I sought yearningly for descriptions of similar experiences in the writings of the great of humanity who bear witness to the tireless struggle for knowledge and truth.

I found wonderful descriptions of contemplation in the works of such mystics as Eckhart, Suso, Tauler, Ruysbroeck, and Boehme. Their God-vision was to me the expression of the highest experience of divine ecstasy. With fanatic zeal I read everything I could discover on metaphysics, philosophy, psychology, mysticism, and religion. Everywhere the same truths, differentiated only by degree! What an incomparable rational experience, to find accounts of the same truth in Pythagoras, in Plato, in the Eleusinian Mysteries, in the experiences of Buddhist saints, in Zen, in the Tao Te Ching, in the Upanishads, and in the Gita.

After all these truths from the various centuries, recognized by various races of various confessions, the saying of the Vedas seemed to soothe and encourage: 'Truth is one, but sages call it by various names.'

But the acquaintance with this wisdom did not make me happy, did not liberate me; and even while reading the Gita with reverence or enjoying the glorious instructions of the Upanishadic sage, Yajnavalkya, I never experienced that state which so often overwhelmed me beneath the rocky cliff. All these grand worlds lay as if behind glass. My mind told me of their greatness and significance for the spiritual development of humanity; yet they never stirred my whole being; they never let the self break out of its bodily prison as it did in the experiences by the cliff, when my consciousness embraced the whole world.

And so I came to the bitter realization that all these great truths were not identical with my deeds and thoughts, but rather that the mind just touched upon them, to be snatched away the next instant by some sensory impression of ordinary daily life, attached to matter and transience. A deep pain sought me out anew—the consciousness of a laming insufficiency. Yet from this sorrow, which lasted many years, arose the knowledge that the final and highest aim of my life could be to make this once-experienced, world-embracing, blissful consciousness of my own Self flow as an oil-like, deep undercurrent, which never could be cut off by any sense-impression of the phenomenal world.

And yet, who could show me how to carry out this intention in practice; who could tell me the price which would have to be paid? However much I discussed the problem with intellectuals, clergymen, and psychologists, they all gave me mere words, for none of them knew anything about the experience of the Self. Often-used terms like 'subconscious', 'grace', and 'enlightenment' gave no indication of how one might actually come to this highest experience. While studying Buddhism I received for the first time the certainty that every man is destined to attain liberation as soon as he is willing to pay the price for it, namely, giving up all his

attachments. And once, after long considering such thoughts, it seemed as if I were again sitting under that cliff at home. Before me lay the ocean of world-consciousness; all sects, all religions, all struggles for truth—waves of the same ocean. So many spiritually striving people, so many great and small waves, so many ways to God.

Soon afterwards I entered the gigantic thought-construction of the Vedanta, this genius work created by the eternal human search for truth. From the advaita Vedanta of Sri Shankara that same bliss flowed upon me which I had already experienced as a child viewing the endless sea. In amazement I learned that all worry, all fear, was vain; that my human birth and the irresistible yearning for liberation had set me on the way to the final goal. Vedanta gave me the certainty that every seeker obtains help from the great souls who have already travelled along that path and to whom all-embracing knowledge brought also all-embracing love. Vedanta magically transformed the world for me. I suddenly saw the phenomenal world in a completely different light, and behind the material universe the eternal principles dawned upon me. It soon seemed to me a matter of course that every spiritually-minded person was destined to meet Vedanta, because each bears Vedanta in himself and can experience the highest state only in the final identification of Atman and Brahman.

A fatherly friend who had long been steeped in Vedanta helped me to learn that the struggle for truth is also a wavelike motion, and I became able to overcome the depression which took place after every new achievement. Through him I found the way to Swami Yatiswarananda—who then, in the 1930's, was conducting classes in various European countries—and in the Swami I saw the certainty and proof that all the truths that the mind is capable of perceiving can also be lived as well. Swami Yatiswarananda opened to me the significance of Sri Ramakrishna and his message. Then it seemed to me as if, after long wandering, I had returned to the abode of my own Self.

When Europe became involved in war, which tore me away

from my beloved island, I got to know the cities of the Continent as well, with their masses and the dreadful turmoil of secularized civilization; a devouring longing for the experiences beside the sea took possession of me. I yearned for nothing other than island solitude and the extension of my previous experiences to the complete penetration of myself.

But the war took everything, even my home, with all the earthly possessions that men call their own. And even for years afterwards bombs burst upon the cliffs of my native land, tearing up the graves of my forefathers. Without Vedanta I would have become the victim of despair, grief, and hate. But its knowledge brought me peace of mind. It taught me that even home, the nearest and dearest of my conceptions and memories, had to break down so that I might become free from all attachments in order to attain the truth that there is only one enduring home, only one refuge in the universe—the Self. And I experienced the same as Omar Khayyam who, searching for Dschemshid's bowl that mirrored the world, learned from his master that he himself was the famous goblet. But this time it was not to stop at mere rational knowledge; this time the teacher was found who knew the way to realization and the price which had to be paid. Through study of the Scriptures, company of enlightened souls, *japam*, and meditation, Vedanta proved to me that this wonderful extension of consciousness towards an all-embracing oneness, which I had enjoyed as a grace on the island, was my own birthright, my own Self, my real, divine nature. Vedanta showed me that, after overcoming all causal limitations, it was possible to become absolute consciousness.

Today Vedanta is no longer a mere dry intellectual construction for me, no abstract conception; rather it is the highest wisdom of my own Self, an all-embracing expression for all human striving towards truth and light.

What a man once knows he can never forget. And if one knows Vedanta to be the way to the knowledge of the Self, then one reaches the light, just as a cave acquires light when a candle is lighted, even if it has lain in darkness for centuries.

If I ask myself what Vedanta means to me, it is the same as asking the question: What does life mean to me? After having been drawn for five long years through the closest thickets of war madness, I learned that there is not much meaning left except the obligation to struggle, with every breath, for the complete realization of my own Self, which alone is eternal, indestructible, omnipresent, and divine.

Swami Atulananda

MY FIRST acquaintance with India was through her religion and that has always remained my main point of contact. I remember how many years ago, in the West, I complained to one of our swamis, though we had lived together so long, I still knew so little about India. And what was the swami's reply? 'My boy,' he said, 'I have given you the best that India has to give.' How significant and true was the answer. For had he not initiated me into the deepest mysteries of Vedanta? Had he not made me a Hindu even while living in the West? What greater thing has India to give to the world than her eternal religion? What other country has any gift to offer that can be compared with the priceless gift of India—her religion?

That I do not take Hinduism or Vedanta in a sectarian sense I shall now try to make clear. I will do so by taking up a question that is put to me every now and then both in India and when I was in the West. The question is this: Why have you adopted Hinduism as your religion? Is not Christianity a good religion? Does it not lead to the highest goal? Does it not bring salvation to its true votaries? If so, why then did you renounce the religion in which you were born, the religion of your native land, the religion in which you had been raised and trained? Besides—so they said in the West—see what Christianity has done for us. Compare the social and material conditions in Christian countries with the conditions of the land where Vedanta took its birth and where it is the national religion today. Certainly if we look at the poverty of India and compare it with our prosperity in the West, we cannot but conclude that Christianity is a boon to humanity and we need not go to other lands or religions to improve our conditions.

The last part of this argument is easily met, for I would reply that the prosperity of the West is a development quite apart from her religion. Jesus did not come to earth to teach man how to build up a rich and prosperous society. He came to teach the great lessons of all religions, namely how to get rid of sin, of greed, and lust and hatred and oppression, how to live in the world and not to be of the world. He came to cleanse society of low and degrading conditions, to make man pure and holy. And above all He taught renunciation. 'Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.'

Observe Western society! Where is that meekness, that lowliness of heart which Jesus spoke of? Where is that rest in the soul that Jesus taught? I assure you, there is more of this in India today than in any Western country I have ever visited.

'Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?'

Is this the gospel of health, wealth, and prosperity—the gospel of so-called Christian countries today? No, the prosperity of the West is not due to her love for Christ and obedience to His commands; it is the outcome of human ambition, of struggle for wealth and comfort. And, but too often, this has been done at the expense of all that is highest and noblest in man. Nay, to bring up the prosperity of the West as an argument in favour of Christianity must always fall flat. And thank God it is so. Nay, the children of Sri Krishna, of Buddha, of Shankara, of Lord Chaitanya, of Ramakrishna, of Vivekananda, are not so easily deceived. Neither will the true children of Christ be thus deceived.

But let me look now at the first part of the question. If true Christianity leads the sincere devotee to the highest spiritual goal, why then have I renounced Christianity to become a Hindu? This is a rather pointed question, especially to those who profess

to be the followers of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. For was it not one of Sri Ramakrishna's great gifts to humanity that he demonstrated in his own life and that he taught to others that all religions when sincerely followed lead to the same goal? And did not Swami Vivekananda say in his American addresses: 'I have not come to make you Hindus, I have come to make you better Christians'?

What then am I to answer to the question as to why I gave up Christianity and adopted Hinduism? The answer in my case is really very simple. I did not renounce Christianity for the simple reason that I never was a Christian. Though born in a Christian country, I never accepted Christianity as my religion. I never joined any church or religious denomination. I did not accept religion in any form until I came in contact with Eastern thought. It was only through the glad tidings of the Vedanta, when these came to me through the blessed words of Swami Vivekananda, that I took to the religious life. Christianity had left me stranded. I sought but found no resting place; my doubts were not solved. The churches, the preachers, could not satisfy me. I did not know which way to turn. And it was then that Vedanta came to my rescue. Here for the first time I found my doubts solved; my heart was filled with hope. And when I came in contact with the swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission in the West, the path was made straight and I knew that the goal could be reached and that henceforth everything depended on my own sincerity of purpose.

Therefore, never having accepted Christianity, there was nothing for me to reject, nothing to give up in that direction. It was only after I became a Hindu that I could accept and understand the teachings of Christ. But that is no reason that I should turn round now and become a Christian. For beautiful and life-giving as are the teachings of Christ, there is nothing in His teachings that we do not find in the Vedanta. And now as a Hindu I realize that the great value of Vedanta lies in the fact that it reconciles all religions. It breaks down all barriers of sectarianism and dogmas and it establishes absolute freedom of thought. Had I been a Christian to start with I would probably have accepted Christ as

my Chosen Ideal; I would have tried to find my inspiration from the Bible. Of course it was only natural that my heart went out in the direction from which I had received my first inspiration.

~~As a Vedantist I can have no quarrel with true Christianity as~~
 Christ taught it.

When Swami Vivekananda came to the West, people thought that he had come to start a new religious sect. He was interviewed by the representatives of most of the leading journals. And to these men he had to give out what he and his message stood for. The Swami then told them distinctly that sects are founded on non-essentials. The essential part of all religion is very much the same; all religions are different expressions of the same truth as suited to different minds; Vedanta is the kernel of all religions; leaving aside non-essentials, it lays stress on that which is the basis of religion.

From this it follows that Vedanta does not ask anyone to give up his own religion. When one becomes a Vedantist he need not cease to be a Christian. One may remain a Christian and study the Vedanta in the hope that by doing so, new light may be thrown on his own religion. In other words, that by doing so he may become a better Christian.

The study of Vedanta may take us away from the narrow teachings of the Church, but it will make us worshippers of the true Christ who dwells in every heart.

For example, when Swami Vivekananda heard the story of Magdalene who came to Jesus and washed His feet with ointment, and wiped them with her hair, the Swami exclaimed: 'Had I lived in Jesus' time I would have washed His feet with my heart's blood.' Was not the Swami at that moment a true Christian? Did he not realize in a flash the divinity of Christ? And in doing so, was he not also a true Hindu? Did he not also do honour to his own master, who had told him that he had worshipped Jesus and that Jesus the Christ had appeared before him and in His special form had entered into his very being? Jesus and Ramakrishna were united, they had become one, even as Jesus was one with His

heavenly Father. In Sri Ramakrishna all religions were united—all the avatars were embodied in him. How then can we Hindus be at war with any sincere seeker after Truth, no matter what religion he belongs to? Does not Vedanta hold the key to all religions?

I remember how once, on my way to Delhi, I was travelling in a third-class compartment and I wore my gerrua cloth. A missionary had noticed me, and at every station he would leave his own compartment and have a good look at me. At last he took courage and he entered my compartment. Then he asked me why I had forsaken Jesus. I told him: 'Sir, seeing that I have adopted the Hindu religion, you take it for granted that I do not honour Christ. But you are greatly mistaken. It was through a Hindu that I first came to understand who Jesus really was. I looked upon Jesus as a great and good teacher—a holy man. But through Swami Vivekananda I have learned to regard Him as one of the incarnations of God.' And I told him that only after coming to India had I learned to appreciate many of Jesus' sayings and parables. Only in India had the stories of the Bible become real and lifelike to me. Jesus' most valuable teachings had remained obscure and meaningless to me, until I came to this country. For here the same truths that Jesus taught have been understood better than they are understood by the majority of the preachers of the West. Here these truths have been carried into practice for ages, long, long before Jesus appeared on earth. Jesus was an Easterner; He spoke in the language of the East. He was a sann-yasin; He walked in the footsteps marked out by the ancient Hindu scriptures. Jesus was a sage, a son of God. And in this land of sages, of avatars, His words are understood not only in the letter, but also in the spirit.

It is for these reasons that I say that as a Vedantist I am a Christian in the true spirit of the word. Vedanta includes all religions. But I am not a Church-Christian. The Churches will still have to come to India, will still have to sit at the feet of Indian sages to learn the true significance, to get the true interpretation, of Jesus' sublime teachings.

In the year 1876 the Emperor of Japan sent a committee of thoughtful men to Europe to study and observe particulars about the Christian religion. These men were to note the difference between the various sects and also to observe what effect the Christian faith had upon the masses of the people. This was done with the idea that, if the report were favourable, Christianity would be adopted by Japan as the religion of the state. Here was an opportunity for an enormous expansion of the Christian faith. But the report of the committee, when they returned to Japan, was altogether unfavourable. The hopeless muddle and confusion that exists in the religious world of the West, and the fact that as a vital force the teaching of Christ was hardly a factor at all in the lives of the people, made the Japanese Government conclude that it was not worth while to change their religion to Christianity. And Japan kept to Shintoism as the state religion, though the majority of the people are Buddhists.

It is one of my great experiences in India to discover that religion here holds a far more prominent place in the lives of the people than is the case in the West. And I can say from experience that, travelling through India and observing the masses here, one is more often reminded of Jesus, His life, and His teaching, than when one is travelling in Western countries.

Another of my experiences in India is that here I found not only tolerance, but sympathy with all religions. Every religion is welcome in India, every faith may establish itself here without the least fear of being persecuted. And no Hindu will ever think of desecrating a place of worship. Every place of worship is holy in the sight of the Hindus.

As Hindus we say: 'Brother, worship God in your own way. Only one thing we ask of you—do not disturb our faith; let us also worship in our own way.'

How different it is in the West. Thank God we no longer live in the time of the Inquisition when men and women by the thousand were tortured to death because they could not accept a prescribed faith. But just the same, religious sympathy and

tolerance is a lesson that the West may well take to heart. Fortunately, and thanks to Eastern influence, the West is now beginning to learn that lesson. There is no Christian today who does not look back in horror on the barbarous methods employed in religious persecutions in earlier days. Today we can hardly believe it to be true, but records show that in Spain alone the Inquisition burnt alive more than 31,000 persons. And think of it! This was done, as Queen Isabella said, 'for the love of Christ and His Virgin Mother'.

It is a sad story, the story of the Christian Church and Christian martyrs. It is a story of the past and we need not dwell on it today. Neither shall we blame Christ or His teaching for the crimes committed by those who call themselves His followers. But well may we ask the question: Is Christian civilization after all such a perfect success as our Christian friends will have us believe? Class distinction, mammon-worship, oppression, competition—all these abuses may well humble the Western nations. We do not blame the Churches for these conditions, but it is a fact just the same that the Churches, who send men to other nations to bring a higher civilization, as they say, have not been able to keep their own countries clean and pure and honest. That is why so many people in the West have lost faith in the Church and are looking elsewhere for consolation and a broader and truer interpretation of Christ's life and teachings and a truer application of His commands.

Cannot we say then, and say it with confidence, that India has a message for these men and women? In matters religious, India has nothing to learn from the West. On the other hand, India has much to teach to the Western races. The West needs the message of the East. And the message has already gone forth and is going forth, thanks to the effort of Swami Vivekananda and those who have followed him.

But we need not trouble ourselves with the question whether we should call ourselves Christians or Hindus, whether we should accept one incarnation or another. He who has accepted one incarnation accepts them all, for they are all born of the same Spirit.

And when we accept Sri Ramakrishna as the latest manifestation of God on earth, we do so with the conviction that in him we find the fulfilment of the past ages, that in him we find the culmination of the world's culture and spiritual attainment. And when we accept Swami Vivekananda's gospel of this age, we do so because in his gospel we find the wisdom of all ages, the fundamental truth on which all religions are constructed. He brought to the West the gospel that his master revived in India—the ancient gospel, the eternal truth, the religion of the Hindus.

And so by becoming Hindus, we, who are born in Christian lands, do not lose anything. It means expansion, a broadening out, a wider vision. For now we can worship at all shrines, we can adore all saints, we can join in worship with every lover of truth.

Jane Molard

EVERYBODY searches for some *raison d'être*—at least, everybody I have ever known. The following is more a recital of all the things I learned were *not* valuable as a pivot on which to turn an existence than of what I personally found.

It probably began long before, but the acute stage started during a particularly grey and dreary winter in Paris many years ago, when I was beset with what I could only name *feelings*.

The impression given by these feelings was one of generalized nausea, of spinning crazily around in a void with no place to stop, vague aches, and all of this mixed with a sense of guilt—for I thought I knew the underlying reason.

The previous year, in Chicago, my dentist had shaken his head in a doleful manner and announced that 'it would have to come out'. He was referring to a decayed wisdom tooth, but I had other ideas (cowardly, to be sure) and left for Europe without making the fatal appointment.

Now, in reputedly the gayest city in the world, with wisdom tooth still firmly anchored, I was far from gay and on the verge of giving myself up to the local dentist. I decided to do it if the *feelings* became worse—and they did.

One evening, the worst of the feelings I'd had to date made it necessary for me to be removed to a hospital. There I was given sedatives and put to bed in a high white room.

The next morning, when I awoke, I felt smug and safe. I congratulated myself on the 'courage' I'd displayed in coming, for surely, with all its official furniture and clean smells, this must be where my enemy was to be extracted—from my jaw and from my conscience.

Alas, this proved not to be easy.

My first indication came from the doctor who, while taking my pulse, inquired: 'How are we today?'

'I know I'll feel better,' I replied, 'once the tooth is out.'

'Ah yes,' he mused, glancing at the hasty history written up the night before. 'Some fancy about a *dent de sagesse* [wisdom tooth]. . . .'

That was the beginning; I was questioned by that doctor, another one, a nurse, and the new room-mate (who later confided she'd been asked to 'draw me out').

'You're far from home, child—ever feel homesick?'

'Was there an unhappy love affair?'

'Do you get enough rest, air, and exercise?'

'Any insanity in the family?'

And so on. Vainly I expostulated that the only family precedent for my case was an aunt who had very nearly left for her next life because of a generalized infection due to tooth trouble.

I implored them to please remove the tooth, but every day for a week there were questions, sedatives, tests, and X-rays of every part of my anatomy including my skull. Even a dentist was called in, but he seemed less impressed than my own had been with the state of my wisdom tooth.

Finally, one evening I was informed that the next morning I was to be 'operated'—for what, I had no idea and was afraid to ask. Even at the moment when the sodium pentathol was dripping into a vein, I was not sure whether I was to be operated on for brain trouble or tooth trouble.

The tooth—for that was what had been removed—had been in a most unfortunate condition, so much so that I had several days of convalescence before dismissal from the hospital.

And that should have been that.

I thought it was only a question of time, but as weeks passed with no improvement, hopes that my woes would disappear by themselves faded. The *feelings* grew more insistent, and I no longer had the wisdom tooth to blame for them.

Told that a change of air might improve matters, I went to the

mountains to ski. There an odd thing happened to me. Each day, as I skied, I felt that if I could go fast enough, I would leave the ground flying, blot myself into one of the trees on the horizon, lose and thereby unite myself with nature, with the Whole of Things. Would suicide hurt? The *feelings* were very strong and skiing was doing me no good at all.

I decided that I needed to organize my life more efficiently, study, keep a definite schedule, make my days full and busy. I went back to Paris imbued with my new resolutions.

I registered for a French course, contacted friends, had an extra after-dinner liqueur every evening in order not to feel the moments alone with myself before I went to sleep, crowded my daily schedule so that I scarcely had time to think. This worked beautifully for about two weeks, and then I had an experience that stopped me again.

There was an impressionist exhibition in Paris at the time which I went to see. I enjoyed it through Degas, Manet, Van Gogh—up until Gauguin. And then I saw them: three Tahitian natives in coloured and flowered dress, their brown faces void and expressionless, captioned: 'Where Have I Been, Where Am I, Where Am I Going?'

The *feelings* became so strong that I had to go to bed for several days. My neat daily schedule interrupted, I was cast back on myself and often I thought of the picture and the questions it asked. The window of my bedroom overlooked a court paved with squat hard stones. Insidiously the thought came to me that my troubles would be over if I simply walked out of the window.

This was ridiculous. I tried self-analysis, but the feeling of being an entity unto myself escaped me. I saw no place for myself in the scheme of things, nor could I really see any scheme. All I had to express with my life was aloneness; all the lines of communication were down, within myself and without.

Then a letter arrived from the family saying that they'd like to see me and as I wasn't well, why didn't I come home? They were sure all I needed was to find myself once again on familiar territory, replete with years of habit and childhood friends.

And wasn't it time I thought of getting married and settling down?

This brought a reaction, for although I should greatly have liked to see my family about then another sentiment was stronger. The seeds of all I'd been going through had been planted long ago in the Midwest, in the sense of there being something else to life than what was apparently expected of me. If externally I seemed predestined to be a North Shore clubwoman, internally I felt like a sham in that way of life—or like one of those crank inventors who is constantly inventing things for which there's no use.

I had always had a vague envy for those I knew who saw no need to ask themselves why they could raise an arm or open an eye, but I was never really among them. The way of life in which the parents have certain worldly attitudes and ambitions which they defend to the point of raising children to be the same way as they and so on ad infinitum didn't make sense to me. The answer, 'It's nice to have tradition,' was never an adequate one to my 'Why?'. I could not seem to fit myself with any degree of conviction into the accepted mould.

As soon as I was able, I wanted to go to Paris, for Paris—perhaps because of its associations with adventure and romance—seemed to beckon me to a new way of life, one more distinctly my own.

Only at the cost of much work and many logically contrived excuses had I been able to come to Paris, and my parents' asking me to return home hit my ego in the wrong way. It was as if they'd said: 'Why don't you give up? Why don't you admit you've failed?'

Actually, as things were going, I had no idea what I was doing in Paris, but what I'd be doing in the Midwest loomed much more realistically in my imagination, and I knew I couldn't go back. The seeds had sprouted now and I'd feel more of a misfit than before.

Still, it had become imperative that I replace the wisdom tooth as a cause for the *feelings*. These unreasonable doldrums were invalidating every reason for existence and even cutting

off the escape route to forgetfulness of how senseless existence seemed.

I took new courage. The parental advice had borne a certain fruit after all. My problem was probably due to sheer loneliness, and marriage would be the solution.

For some time I had been going out with a young Frenchman who shared my views on life in general. We were in love, but there seemed to be so many barriers between us: different customs, habits, and even language. Suddenly, these barriers seemed so much smaller than ever before—so infinitesimal indeed in comparison with the vaster problem of aloneness—that we were married.

But marriage, while partly solving the loneliness, was by no means in itself the solution I had thought it would be. My husband and I finally agreed that we were happy to be two finding life tasteless, but tasteless it was just the same.

Paris seemed grey and sad. True, there were many theatres and shows of all kinds to be seen; but once they were seen, what more did we have? People lived in boxes in big cities—or went out in the rain and caught cold. Look at the animals in liberty: were they depressed? Did they have *feelings*?

We discussed all this at length and decided that the reason for my *feelings* and the boredom of both of us was that we didn't live close enough to nature. Neither of us, we had to admit, were wild with desire to become farmers, but we decided a sufficient compromise between artificial Parisian life and the natural life of wresting a living from the earth would be a climate where we had the maximum of sunshine, fresh air, and possibilities of sport.

If we picked up roots and went to California? The wisdom tooth was surely a disharmony with our physical environment, which extraction should enable us to live happily ever after.

And we moved to California. The sun, air, and sports were wonderful; we collected wildflowers and haunted the health-food stores. Who could live more naturally, we wondered, yet something still was lacking. We both loved music and started writing

songs together, but we were aware that it was just another thing to pass the time away without knowing why. In short, California went flat like everything else, and parenthood, while hardly flat, left us still two people in a dismally boring world, bringing up a child for what reason? So that the child in turn could feel youth's high hopes changing to boredom, get married, have children, work, and die? I was back in the Midwest without ever going back.

Where have I been, Where am I, Where am I going? The old questions were still unanswered when, on the eve of our departure for France (my husband, still a French citizen, was called back for military service), we had the good fortune to meet Swami Prabhavananda at the Hollywood Vedanta Centre.

There was something different about the Swami. He seemed very calm and wise. We spoke to him of our considerable personal problems, but he didn't seem to find them at all upsetting or unusual. Nor did he say, 'do this, do that' as everyone else did. As I think back, he didn't offer us any solution at all as ordinary people understand the word. But his very presence started us thinking. We read several books, including *The Eternal Companion* and *Discipline Monastique*, and found we were interested.

And when we got to France, we went to the Vedanta Centre at Gletz where we met Swami Siddheswarananda whom we later discovered as our guru.

Frequent periods spent at the ashrama, lectures, reading, and, most important, personal interviews with Swami Siddheswarananda, soon familiarized us more with the scope of Vedanta, and we felt boredom slipping away. The most amazing things were revealed to us. Perfection was in man; man could be perfect, and we had living proof of this in the person of our guru. We had important work to do in life, we were living for a *reason* in our constantly changing bodies. Was it not wonderful?

And another marvellous thing: our lives became integrated around one ideal. It wasn't as before when I abandoned one solution for another. I didn't have to give up my way of living in the Midwest or my way of living in Paris, nor marriage, nor

parenthood, nor anything else for the newer solution of Vedanta. On the contrary, Vedanta gave all these things to me, polished, changed, and beautiful. Each tiny action has meaning, I learned—nothing is lost, nothing is just a question of marking time. Life goes on in the same way, but little by little one's viewpoint changes.

The *feelings* gradually went away. This took a little time, for the clock which had been wound so tightly had to unwind.

In the foregoing account of all the things I found not to be a *raison d'être*, I purposely omitted religion for a reason which I shall try to make clear.

My parents were fortunately very liberal in all religious matters, and I never had to defend any of my beliefs with them. I am sure that at least part of the reason I was later able to accept an Indian system of metaphysics with such ease and no sensation of strangeness was due to this. As a child, I attended a Protestant church (the nearest) and was confirmed. I always said my prayers at bedtime and grace at mealtime. I liked Sunday school service very much although church, in my opinion and that of others of my age, dragged a bit. I believed in prayer and tried to dig the sense out of the prayers I was taught, and due to my grandmother's patience I could repeat by rote every psalm in the Bible at the age of four.

Later, when I was in college, I usually slept late on Sunday mornings, and a strong interest in philosophy replaced Sunday school. Anyone who has had a college interest in philosophy knows of the long and passionate discussions over countless coca-colas and amidst jukebox recordings of popular songs over whether or not man really has a soul or if it is an illusion. (I always contended the former despite the sneers of more advanced thinkers, and I think I even sneered a bit, too.)

Still later, I became a sort of partial pantheist, I suppose. Whenever I saw anything of exceptional beauty, I immediately had the sensation that God was in it. This did not hold true for ugly things.

But in all of these manifestations which might be loosely qualified as 'religious', God was a thing apart. I did not conceive of Him as the Reality sustaining the whole of the manifestation, but as an aesthetic pleasure, a Power, certainly, which could be of aid—comparable to music, for example.

I am sure that although my understanding of religion was thus immature, it nevertheless prepared the ground for Vedanta. However, it took Vedanta to give this, too, back to me in a different light.

Where have I been, Where am I, Where am I going?

Sri Krishna says, in the Bhagavad-Gita: 'I am the end of the path, the witness, the Lord, the sustainer: I am the place of abode, the beginning, the friend and the refuge: I am the breaking-apart, and the storehouse of life's dissolution: I lie under the seen, of all creatures the seed that is changeless.'

Vedanta has given sense and scope to my life, and only a little arthritis on grey, rainy days reminds me that once, long ago, I lost a wisdom tooth.

The Countess of Sandwich

UNDER the heading 'What Vedanta Means to Me' one would be justified in expecting to read a thoroughly clear and concise exposition of what Vedanta really does mean to the writer. It is almost impossible for anyone whose life has been as deeply affected as mine by such a profound philosophy to express one's innermost reactions to this influence, since the intrinsic value of a thing depends upon the individual's own particular temperament and sense of values.

Therefore, in writing this article I am able to offer only an outline of what Vedanta means to me, since its deeper meaning belongs to myself alone, and must remain with me. As it is, I find it is much more difficult to write about myself than it is to talk about myself. I am sure I am not alone in this.

Looking back over the past twenty-odd years of my life, I can clearly see every steppingstone which I traversed and which brought me to where I am today. The very force of circumstances has led me to believe in, and accept, the doctrine of karma—the law of cause and effect, as explained by Vedanta, in-so-far as it affects myself. Behind every major move there has been a definite purpose, and it is this strange sequence of events, and the gaps between, that I shall try to outline.

In 1929 my sister, who had been living in the United States, decided to revisit England and see her family. That same year, even to the very month of her planned coming, I formed an attachment which could not easily have been broken. With absolutely no knowledge of this my sister wrote, almost at the last minute, that she had decided to postpone her visit until the

following year, her reason being that she would have more holiday money to spend.

The months passed, and my attachment grew stronger with their passing, until, in the early spring of 1930, it was inexorably broken by death. My life was made void: I was left empty and alone. In due time my sister arrived, and within a few weeks of her arrival we found ourselves on the high seas. The seemingly casual wish I had expressed—to return with her to the United States—rapidly materialized and the extra money she had saved she used, out of her self-sacrifice and generosity, to pay my passage to that country which later I adopted as my own.

How vivid still is the memory of that long journey. We left England on America's Day of Independence, which meant little to me at that time. It was the week of the full moon; and many an evening during that week I would stand alone on the deck and wonder to what destiny I was being borne on that silver pathway shining across the water. In some vague way I sensed a significance in that silver path, and within six months of my arrival the awareness of a definite guidance in my life began to take shape.

My first introduction to Vedanta came through a casual acquaintance who took me, one Sunday morning, to a 'Hindu temple' on Webster Street, San Francisco. Since that memorable day so long ago, the interior of that little temple or auditorium has been aesthetically improved, but the holiness of its atmosphere remains the same—strong, serene, and all-embracing.

In the quietness that preceded the lecture I looked around in wonderment and no little curiosity at the photographs of the robed and turbaned 'Indians' (as they appeared to me at that time) hanging on the walls, and was particularly struck by a picture I recognized as Christ, seated cross-legged in a forest. Why should He, I wondered, be sitting tailor-wise, looking so calm and peaceful, with eyes closed, so utterly different to the familiar, agonized portrayals I knew? To the left of the rostrum was, and still is, hung a full-length painting of a man, standing with one arm up-raised, looking, to my ignorant eyes, for all the world like a very bad caricature of King George V.

The words Swami, Vedanta, yoga, meditation posture were totally unknown to me. I had far to go and much to learn. Even so, while I sat there in the stillness of waiting I experienced the most extraordinary conviction that I *belonged* there: and the strange sensation of warmth that enveloped me, I could only describe later, was as if a blanket had been wrapped around me. I had *come home*.

Time has not dimmed this memory, nor will it ever. Already my course was being set, and I was being launched on the path of no return.

Twenty-four years later I revisited this scene of my beginning and looked again, but with what different eyes, at the objects of my earlier curiosity. The imaginative drawing of Christ I could now understand; his posture seemed natural. The photographs of the 'Indians' had long since become portraits of swamis I had learned to revere; and where once I had seen 'King George', I now saw Sri Ramakrishna, the modern prophet and exponent of Vedanta, pointing the Way and bestowing benediction. And, as he looked at me and smiled, I wept: because I saw him smile. We read into everything we see—never out of it.

The silence was finally broken by an orange-robed emissary of Vedanta as he groped his way through the curtains at the back of the rostrum and began to chant in that strange language which only later I learned to be Sanskrit. And, as I listened to the chanting of those first Vedic prayers, that peculiar sensation which some time or another we all have experienced, came over me; my spine tingled and my whole body felt like a mass of 'gooseflesh'. I have no clear recollection of the words I heard that morning; I only know that every utterance made sense. Something within me responded, so much so that, for the duration of my stay in San Francisco, I attended every lecture and every class—three times a week.

After walking two blocks in silence my companion asked me, 'Well! What do you think of it?' He, being a 'metaphysical rover', was equally ready to sympathize or ridicule. I might go so far as to say that my answer, 'I am going again,' somewhat surprised him. He, being 'broader-minded' than I, never accompanied me

again. He had served his purpose. But, to those two swamis I met in San Francisco, Swami Vividishananda and Swami Ashokananda, I shall for ever remain most reverently indebted, since it was they who first set my feet in the way I was to follow.

The original purpose of my going to America had been to work in partnership with my sister whose business was the creating and making of beautiful feminine luxuries—to meet the wants, rather than the needs, of the rich. But, simultaneously with my arrival, there came the great financial crash of 1929-30, which brought to an abrupt standstill my sister's business and my future hopes. Out of this unexpected development our ways were divided and I, a stranger in a strange land, was thrown upon my own resources—and how limited they were I was soon to find out. From childhood we had been taught by that wisest of all mothers never to say 'I can't' but rather to 'put can't in your pocket and take out try!' This homily has always served me in good stead, even though the practice of it seldom provided me with more than the barest necessities.

It is only in retrospect that we come to attach a significance to an incident which, at the time of its happening, had passed unnoticed. We take our freedom of movement and decision for granted. We think we hold the reins which direct our ways. We plan, and we counter-plan, and later we find that perhaps, after all, the counter-planning was not entirely our own doing: that is, those of us who believe in divine guidance. The rope of 'free-will' which tethers us, be it ever so long, has its limits, beyond which we cannot go. My so-called counter-planning took me to Los Angeles, and in my pocket I carried the address of the Hollywood Vedanta centre—yet in its infancy. It was not until 1934 that it became an incorporated society.

At the time I never bothered to analyse the quite probable reason why, when I got off the streetcar at the junction of Hollywood Boulevard and Ivar Avenue one hot Sunday morning in October 1931, I was so certain of my destination that, instead of referring to the address given to me when I left San Francisco, I

quite blithely started off in the opposite direction, until I reached the 1400 block, where nowhere I could find a building even remotely resembling a 'Hindu Temple'. Those who know that district will appreciate the futility of my search. Even the most elementary psychiatrist would find no difficulty in analysing the reason of my straying. My feet had followed the dictates of my subconscious mind. Only much later I realized that the force which turned my steps and sent me hurrying in the opposite direction that morning is the same force as that which has brought me to where I am today.

'And I doubt not through the ages, one increasing purpose runs.' Until I reached the beginning of the hill which led me to my goal my steps kept pace with those words. Indeed, in my frantic haste I ran with the 'purpose' until, halfway up the hill, my tune changed. Almost sobbing for want of breath, because I was already so late, I inwardly questioned: 'And does the road wind uphill all the way?' I found that it did. And still it does, only in a different sense.'

Since that day, great changes have been made to alter the face of that once remote and peaceful part of Hollywood. So much so that in a negative and quite literal sense, science could claim to have fulfilled the Scriptures. By the construction of the new free-ways, that which was crooked has been made straight, and that which once was high has been brought low, so that the gleaming white temple which for many years had remained hidden and unknown, except to the very few, now stands out as a symbol of purity and peace at the very portals of Hollywood and Los Angeles. Everything that once hid it has been ploughed under.

But at the time of my seeking, no temple stood there. Only the number, 1946, so modestly painted in black on the old-fashioned mailbox set back under a clump of bamboos, told me that, at last, I had reached my destination. By that time my teeth were on edge, my heart was pounding, and I was soaked with the sweat of my hurrying, so that when I reached the open door of that weather-beaten old green bungalow, set high on the terrace at the end of the winding path, I paused. How cool and peaceful

it looked inside that dear room, shaded by the overhanging eaves. Little did I know then that I was standing on the threshold of what was to be my home for the next twenty years. The chanting was over, but I was not too late to share with the small group within the blessing of that one who was to become my guru, and my friend, through life and in death. The intonation of his benediction, 'Peace, peace, peace,' will ring in my heart for ever.

We learn much, and we forget much, in this mad whirlpool of life, but there are some things, some memories, which neither time nor circumstance can take from us, and the price of such rare gems as we carry in our hearts is far above crown or coronet. One such pearl set in the heart is of far greater worth than the costliest diamond on any finger. Riches have their place, whether they are within or without; their value rests with those who own them.

For a few weeks I attended every lecture and class the Swami gave. The meaning of Vedanta was fast taking hold of my mind and heart. In it I found hope, and a lessening of the loneliness conditions had imposed upon me. After some time, when my courage was sufficient, I accepted the invitation extended to all by the Swami, and made an appointment to see him. How kind he was. How patiently he listened to the feeble and inconsequential tale I unfolded while, all the time, I picked nervously at the wicker tub-shaped chair I sat on. My immediate need was temporal rather than spiritual: I needed a friend rather than a spiritual guide—or so I thought. But how often since that first personal contact I have cringed with shame at my audacity in imposing upon that holy man my stupid little problems. But they were very real, and I was very lonely. Looking back later I saw, in that interview, yet another of the steppingstones I had already begun to count. I saw that I was either hopping, skipping, or jumping—sometimes even slipping—headlong into an entirely new way of life—the Vedanta way.

The following Sunday, after the morning lecture, the Swami introduced me to Sister Lalita, and invited me to share their mid-day meal with them. Oh, the wonderful simplicity of those early,

happy days! What nostalgic memories they bring back. With that first meal began the happiest period of my life. Little did I dream that, before very long, the Swami would be teaching me how to make the curry I was sharing, and which he had made himself the day before. How many tons of curry I made during the years that followed would be difficult to estimate.

During those early days, the kindness of those two wonderful people, the one a Hindu, and the other an American, to me, so British and a member of that nation which still held India in subjection, can only be called *spiritual*. In my ignorance of politics (which still persists) I trod right and left on many sensitive toes, but the love and friendship I received, from the Swami particularly, was above any form of nationalism. I remember a well-deserved and spirited retort I once got from Sister, when I said, 'But *your* father was English!' 'Yes, but he was a good man in spite of that!' The laughter that followed was indicative of the unity of spirit which prevailed among us.

Just before I met him, someone had given the Swami an antiquated and enormous automobile, which he had only recently learned to drive. Many a time I found myself nervously questioning his skill, since his lack of knowledge of mechanics then is equalled only by my own today. But *his* faith was supreme, mine was not. 'Taking the name of the Lord', he would set out on the most hazardous journey in perfect trust. So much so that there seemed little point in praying, as long as he was out: the Lord's attention was otherwise occupied!

On one occasion the Swami set out with Sister and myself to visit some students sixty miles away. As usual, the speed was at its maximum, so that when a sudden emergency arose, the brakes were slammed on, the car skidded on the soft gravel shoulder, and then careened crazily across the road, rocking on two wheels, until it came to the most amazing halt on the other side, facing the way we had come. The various reactions to that near-disaster were typical. Little Sister remained calm and quite silent; I swore, quite blasphemously I'm sure; the dog barked; while the Swami, from

the moment of skidding, had taken his hands off the wheel, tucked his feet up on the seat, and silently repeated the name of the Lord! And I have absolutely no doubt that it was this very act of handing over the controls that saved us. The sceptic will say the car righted itself but, out of the little understanding I had already gained, and out of my observation of the daily life of the Swami, I knew otherwise. He lived and moved and had his being in God. His trust was complete.

In answer to the questions which may arise: 'Why these seemingly irrelevant anecdotes? What place have they under such a heading? What purpose do they serve?' I would say that, to me, such incidents played a vastly important part in my life, then even as now. It is in the little, incidental things, in the trivial round and common task of everyday life that one's true character is revealed. Even the greatest coward can appear a hero by one act of bravery done on the spur of the moment. I went into Vedanta *cold*. I knew nothing whatsoever of its philosophy or way of life. Up to that time religion had meant very little more to me than an ethical code, as set forth in the Ten Commandments. I was familiar with the teachings of Christ, in that I could quote them, but it was only after I began to study Vedanta that I came to understand the meaning of much I had hitherto understood as Christianity. So often, in those early years, I would say, '*That's* what Christ meant when He said . . .' and I would quote some parallel teaching. Instead of *cowardice* I came to see a tremendous *strength* in the turning of the other cheek. I discovered the limitless depths—and heights—of charity. In the daily life of the Swami I was privileged to see, for the first time, religion being *lived*, and it was after his example that I longed most desperately to pattern my own life.

In the life of Sister also I found much to emulate. Until she met Swami Prabhavananda this widowed mother had, for thirty years since her meeting with Vivekananda, lived only for her son, until the time came for her to begin 'the quiet work' she had been told would be hers to do. Renunciation of 'me and mine' plays a huge part in the practice of Vedanta, or any other religion, but

sometimes death itself must come to sever the tie too strong for mortal will to loose. But its blow is not entirely deadly; the void it creates need not be lasting. Life continues, and to an open mind and heart there is given much that had been shut out. The twenty years of selfless devotion and service Sister gave to the work of the spiritual son given into her care (though seemingly of her own choosing) and the steady growth of her own spirit, still stand out in my own life as a glorious testimony of a living faith in, and surrender to, God. Such examples come very rarely into one's life, and blessed are they who recognize them.

Need I say that my own recognition was pitifully slow in developing? I remember with abysmal shame the shock I once gave the Swami when I remarked, 'Swami, I don't think Sister is very spiritual, do you?' For days I shuddered under the shock of the blow I got in return! That dreadful *faux pas* marked not only the beginning of my discipline, but also my silent pledge of obedience. Sister was seventy-two years old, while I was not yet thirty. Her steps were slow and mine were swift and yet, until the strain upon myself and the pressure of duty became unbearable, I was disciplined to walk or stand still behind that gentle lady. Sometimes she would stop to water a drooping plant, pull out a stray weed, or pick off a few dead leaves from her rose bushes, while I, itching to dash into the house and prepare the next meal, answer the telephone, or attend to some other matter, had to stand and wait and always keep behind. My impatience knew no bounds, and well the Swami knew it. He had come to know the material he had set himself to mould; granite and clay are vastly different substances; and, to my sorrow, I know well that that moment marked the beginning of the grey hair one sees today.

In the years that followed—the hard, the lean, the happy years—I saw the rebel confounded, the egoist humbled, the wayward forgiven, and the abject lifted up. Indeed, who had the power to resist for long that tremendous spiritual force? In all truth I can say that the very resistance this force met served only to increase its strength. It has been said that a chain is as strong as its weakest link and, generally speaking, it is true; but, in watching this saintly

man I saw that *one* link, if strong enough, could securely hold together the weakest chain. How sadly lacking, and how desperately needed, is this force of love in the world today. It is the one constructive power man has within himself, would he but exercise and use it.

During the intervening months of my first meeting with the Swami, and the circumstances which finally brought me into his home, I had tried to establish myself as a seamstress. With no training in the art, nor the time and patience it took to learn it, I soon discovered that dressmaking was not my forte. In my first attempt I turned the material inside out, and so lost my first client. Almost everything I stitched had to be unstitched and stitched again, so that by the time I had paid the rent of my one-roomed apartment and the rental of the sewing machine which gave me so much trouble, I had very little, sometimes nothing at all, left for food—and it was partly out of their knowledge of my predicament that the Swami and Sister shared their Sunday meals with me. It was also for the same reason that they quite unexpectedly proposed that I give up my precarious way of life and stay with them for the two weeks of waiting before the approaching marriage of Sister's niece. The house next door, then separated, but now annexed to the Vedanta property, was occupied by Sister's sister and her daughter, and the proposed plan was that I should live with the mother after her daughter's marriage, and at the same time assist where I could at the Centre. And how gladly I accepted that proposal.

For two, almost three, weeks my cup of happiness was full, but other changes of plans between the mother and daughter developed, which sadly dashed my hopes and drained my cup. During my stay with the Swami and Sister I had not been idle, so that one part of me was sorely tempted to say yes when they asked me to remain on; but that other part of me was still so British that my pride and stubbornness made it impossible. I could not accept what I then interpreted as 'charity'. I was adamant and quite determined to extricate myself as soon as possible from the 'false' position in which I thought myself.

So it was that through one of the Swami's students I learned that a foreign actress who had recently arrived in Beverly Hills after a huge success on the New York stage wanted someone, preferably English, to help her with her pronunciation and grammar. In spite of my uncertain technical knowledge, of the latter especially, I went to see her. For the occasion I bought the most ghastly hat from Hollywood's leading store of that time which, need I say, I never wore again. During our first meeting it was decided that, if we found ourselves compatible, we would go, together with her sister, to stay for three months in a small cottage farther down the coast. This arrangement exactly suited my purpose, so that, after two weeks, I left the Centre and set off in pursuit of independence.

During those three months I revelled in the luxury of freedom from financial anxiety and enjoyed the companionship and friendship which sprang up between my 'pupil' and myself. My task was not easy. How many gallons of midnight oil I burned each night, preparing the next day's 'lesson', my friend never knew, but somehow or another, I managed to keep one jump ahead of her so that, in our different ways, we both benefited. At the end of those three months I was brought face to face with yet another decision—a hugely important one. On the one hand—New York, and the continuance of my new-found independence: on the other hand—the Centre and all it stood for. Money has power and great persuasion but, where there is no money, one must depend upon grace and love. It was the latter I chose.

In those years of growth of the Vedanta Society, which now stands relatively secure, there was no money. For years we lived from hand to mouth on the good-will offerings of a few staunch devotees. They were lean years, and hard years, but how rich, how fruitful, they were! In my decision I lost nothing and gained everything worth while. Unlike those who followed later, drawn to the life of the spirit, my coming was to serve, and where I could serve I did; but in the final analysis it was I who benefited. Several years before I left England, a well-known Indian professor, the late Narendra Nath Gangulee, wrote the following inscription in

a book he gave me: *Make your life fruitful in service*. In the years to come I was to discover the wisdom of his advice.

So the years passed, and with their passing came many changes. It was always in retrospect that I saw the purpose and necessity of the severe discipline I underwent. At the time of its administration I often questioned the severity, which at times seemed to my hurt and self-justified ego, downright unfair. But, without that discipline, where would I be today I wonder? How well I remember, and how closely I still hug to my heart, the memory of the comfort I found in the little shrineroom, in my hours of solitude. How vastly different are the states of solitude and loneliness. We seek the one, and try to escape the other.

Never, I am sure, was the Lord plagued by a more wretched 'David' than I, when, out of the depths of my loneliness and hunger for understanding, I would take the Book of Psalms and pour out to Him the most miserable lamentations I could find. Tears of supplication—and self-pity—would stream down my face as I wailed aloud until, finally exhausted, I could cry and read no more. That He 'hearkened' there was no doubt. For, in the calmness that followed these outpourings I came to know what *peace* was. I knew that what I was being taught was *true*. I knew that the kingdom of God *was* within, and within reach of all. Also I caught a glimpse of the light shining in darkness. Brief, yet blessed, were those periods of discovery, during which my roots went deep. Blow and buffet as they might, never again had the winds of adversity the power to uproot that which had become 'so surely anchored on the steadfast rock of immortality'. Faith, belief—what do these words mean, until they have been tested? Those who use them have either proved their meaning and value in their own lives, or have yet to do so. Of themselves they have no meaning whatsoever. 'Not everyone that saith . . . Lord, Lord shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.' By our fruits are we known.

Complacency is a pitfall into which so many of us who feel secure too easily fall. The events which were to terminate those

happy years within the Vedantic fold came quite suddenly, and soon my shroud of complacency was stripped from me. We may think we are the masters of our fate but, in reality, how little mastery we have over the karma we have sown in the past for our future reaping! Speaking for myself, I only know that, whereas I had thought my last steppingstone had been cleared, and that I had at last found a sure and permanent foothold among those I loved so well, and had made my own, karma again reared its head and beckoned me on, and far away, into an unbelievably different path set with stones even more slippery. My period of service and discipleship was abruptly ended by the arrival of an unknown and unexpected guest.

In order to introduce this guest properly, and explain the change his coming brought into my life, I must digress. In 1900, when Swami Vivekananda travelled from America to India via Europe, there was included in the party a young American girl, Alberta Sturges, and her aunt, Josephine MacLeod, more familiarly known as Tantine. Alberta travelled with her aunt only as far as Rome and, as far as I know, that was the last time she saw Vivekananda. Through the lectures and classes on Vedanta given in New York by the Swami, she had become much interested in the teachings, so that seven years after her marriage to George Montagu—who in 1916 succeeded to the title of the Earl of Sandwich—they visited India. The Ramakrishna Math at Belur near Calcutta had been founded before his death by Swami Vivekananda, and there, and at Benares, the two met some of the Swami's brother monks. The joyous welcome they received left a lasting impression upon Lord Sandwich's mind so that, when Alberta died in 1951, he decided to visit the Vedanta Society of Los Angeles, California, about which he had heard so much from Tantine, who had died there in 1949. Thus it came about that in March 1952 this stranger came through the gates I had entered twenty years before and which I had thought had clanged shut behind me for ever.

Lord Sandwich's first visit lasted less than two days. His freighter carried him to San Francisco where, almost immediately,

it caught on fire, causing a delay of more than four weeks. Hearing of this Swami Prabhavananda invited Lord Sandwich to return and wait at the Centre until his boat was ready to sail. The result of this series of events, which followed each other so quickly, was that I returned to England and was married to Lord Sandwich later the same year.

My life's pattern was inexorably changed. I had yet to prove to myself what Vedanta meant to me.

Like every other religion, Vedanta is a way of life—the Godward way. It is based on the one Truth taught by all the Scriptures and exemplified by all the great teachers and saints. The differences lie in the names and forms only—in the externals—except I would say that Vedanta differs in one major respect, in that it accepts and respects all religions and sees the importance and need of the 'many mansions'. Essentially, we are all brothers, children of the one Father; but this does not mean that every member must live within the same fold. Vedanta does not proselytize. Rather it says, to each his own, and to each belongs the freedom to worship according to his own need and preference. That is man's prerogative.

Temperaments vary, and every individual believes and acts according to his own particular spiritual development, understanding, environment, and influence. To say that one's own religion is right, and all others are wrong, belies religion itself. It belies the spirit of brotherhood, and denies all charity, without which there can be no religion. It stands to reason that, by claiming the Fatherhood of God, we automatically claim the brotherhood of man, and the highest expression of that relationship is *charity*—charity as defined by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Corinthians.

Standards of conduct differ, and, unfortunately, it is man's greatest folly that he looks for, and judges by, the mote he finds in his brother's eye, rather than concern himself with the greater problem of his own beam. To condemn another in the light of one's own limited vision; to criticize where there is no under-

standing; to sit in the seat of the scornful and pass judgement without justification is a sadly human trait. To try *not* to do so, even under the severest provocation; to try rather to understand and make allowances for another's misunderstanding or misinterpretation, and to do so without bitterness or resentment—in that effort lies the beginning of charity, or *love*—in its broadest and fullest sense.

Therefore I would say that Vedanta means to me precisely what Christianity or any other religion means to anyone who sincerely tries to follow its teachings. The precepts are the same. The goal is not different. Even though the path each one follows may seem to be different, the struggle is the same for all. To try to live up to one's own faith, to hold on to hope, and to practise charity is indeed a hard and uphill task. But, to quote the words of the wise, the eventual success of one's striving lies 'not in never falling, but in getting up each time'.

John Yale

I REMEMBER seeing, a few years ago, after the publication of *The Seven Storey Mountain* and other books along the same line, a cartoon, perhaps in *The New Yorker*, which has since given me a few smiles. It pictured a dowager in a lending library trying to decide on a book. 'In any case I know what I *don't* want,' she was informing the clerk, 'and that is another of those stories about some young man going from radicalism to psychoanalysis, to social science, and finally ending up a monk.'

Yes, this is almost a standard pattern just now—quite possibly banal. But it seems a design not easily avoided by the person of good will who reached his teens in the early days of the Depression. Something similar to the first three phases, at least, is almost predestined. But not all have gone on to the fourth, the turn to religion. Just as phases one, two, and three—under the circumstances—were fairly unavoidable, so the last stop, in my opinion, is the appropriate end of the course. Not monasticism for all—that would not be practical from several standpoints—but the serious pursuit of spiritual truth.

It was the pattern I followed. I was born in a middle-class Midwestern Protestant family. We belonged to a denomination which was still strongly fundamentalist. As a child in Sunday school I was vastly attracted to Jesus Christ. I was perfectly sure then—and I have never since believed otherwise—that Christ was God and came to earth to show man how to find God. The intention came to me early to be a good man and find and follow some great ideal. I would be a good Christian and devote my life to helping mankind.

But I found this easier said than done. As I grew up several

things began to trouble me about the religious heritage in which I was born. First, was the matter of exclusiveness. The people of our denomination felt they possessed Truth uniquely, and taught that idea. It didn't matter that all the other Protestant denominations did so too, and the Catholics as well. Besides, it wasn't a case merely of all those others simply being wrong; they were also going to be punished for their bad judgement in having chosen to ride on an incorrect band-wagon. They would have a lesser place in heaven, or perhaps not get there at all. And as to the vast non-Christian world, well, its billion and a half members were certainly going to be largely damned.

But how could anyone be so sure of this? One didn't have to be overly observant to see that usually it worked out that a person was narrow because he was limited, ignorant. Was it intelligent to conclude that someone who had been born into a different spiritual tradition and was following it conscientiously should be punished for a failure to be disloyal to his best lights? What if you were a native somewhere where no missionary had ever penetrated? And what about those who had lived and died before Christ was even born? How could the leaders of our denomination be so sure that Jews and Mohammedans and Hindus and Buddhists—yes, and even Roman Catholics—were not getting something from their faith? What about the elevated Scriptures of other religions and the fact that wise men, perhaps even saints, were known among the pagans? Was not this attitude of thinking everyone else wrong just a terrible religious provincialism?

A second problem of my adolescent attempts to be a practising Christian was that I could never seem to get 'saved'. As described in the many sermons I listened to during this period, conversion was an occurrence which, when it came, gave you a particular assurance and miraculously changed you from a bad to a good person. But to my frequent dismay, although I prayed for it and repented to my fullest ability, I could not attain this transformation.

A third difficulty was my failure to see how, if God was God, such differences should be allowed to exist between man and man

in capacity, opportunity, and inclination. I listened to the various Christian explanations of this; but they added up, it seemed to me, to one of two conclusions—that God must be either demonic or whimsical. If demonic, how could He be God? And if His acts were capricious, why bother to posit, as responsible for the universe, the existence of a God at all? Since I wanted the Director of all creation to practise at least the minimum code of justice of a good and wise human, I could not accept the Christian explanations of individual differences.

Fourth, to me the Christian doctrine of history was not reasonable. It simply did not explain the past sensibly or give a man a means for viewing the present or future. Propounded by that most able public relations man of the early Church, St. Augustine, in his *The City of God*, the theory is so familiar as to seem almost law: Creation began at a certain point in time and is proceeding towards a culmination which will continue eternally. Adam was born guiltless, but tempted by Satan, through his own self-will, fell from his perfect condition, introducing sin into the world. All men inherit this sin, and each has his chance—one chance—to come out of it. Some continue in sin to their death and are thereafter everlastingly damned; some, through the mediation of Christ as expressed through the Catholic Church, gain their redemption and share in an unending resurrection. History thus becomes but a battle between the powers of God and Satan, from which God must emerge victorious. Earthly troubles—persecutions, wars, temptations to follow false gods, and all other evils of past and present—have a purpose: they are the flails with which God (*our* God, that is, the true God of the Old and New Testaments), since the beginning of time, has separated the wheat from the chaff, the elect from the damned. They have been the tools that have fashioned the citizens with whom He would populate His city of vision, paradise.

What a crude and naïve teaching—and how complacent! Everything that I knew was at variance with any straight-line theory of progress; and time, which is its very cornerstone, had already been seen to be illusory. The concept of perpetual progress

did not square with common observation, let alone with scientific findings. Augustine did not see that the new order he was promoting was certain also in time to lose its dynamic quality, as the Roman Empire of his day had done, and to enter, equally, into its own period of barbarism and decay. How could one, on the basis of the Christian theory of history, explain the infinite age of this universe, the decline of great cultures and valid religions, the rise and fall of plant and animal life, the rhythm of evolution-involution our eye is witness to from our birth? How, indeed, to view the falling off of Christian sanctity, the fracturing of Christian society, the vulgarization of the Church—that gate of the City of God—itsself?

And a fifth stumbling-block to any adjustment to Christianity on my part was its, to me, inadequate handling of the problem of evil. There is the force of evil, personified by Satan; and of good, exemplified by God. Each wars in this universe, and in men's hearts, at times one winning, and at times the other. However, the end of the story, as of a video melodrama, is known in advance: God has the greater power and is sure to triumph in the end.

To this I always said: 'Then why does He let it go on—all this mess, all this suffering? If He really is stronger, why doesn't He put an end to the agony?'

And I was given this answer: 'Oh no. We grow by suffering. Evil is permitted to persist for its chastening value. We are trained by evil.'

'But are we?' I would reason. 'Is evil a proper tool for a good Almighty to use?' (Youth is always shocked that God should be so much less perfectionist than he!) 'Many are not trained at all—only downed by the world's evil. If God is omnipotent, and it's trained people that He wants, then why doesn't He just create us already chastened, finished, trained?'

And the answer that I got: 'Because we don't permit Him to. Because of the perversity in man's heart. Man wants to do wrong; he likes doing wrong. He was once perfect, but he chose to turn away. He chose, as he still goes on choosing, to spurn perfection.'

I saw, of course, that Christians must take this position, for without it the whole idea of Christ as special redeemer—on which Christian theology is based—would fall. But really, who can agree that any human being would choose evil, clear-mindedly prefer to spurn God? One could be ignorant, impassioned, impetuous, a fool. But would anyone rationally decide to remain permanently perverse, habituated in a course which must lead to his own eternal pain? Putting the onus on Adam didn't help, for is it logical that I should suffer as a result of the activities of some individual I never knew, thousands of years ago? And advancing the theory of predestination—that God wants some people to be lost—well, that is just a blasphemous teaching; that is, again, making God demonic.

That man has a tendency to be less than a saint, that pain may be educational, I readily admitted. But that God should will man to suffer, or that man should rationally pursue wickedness—that I couldn't and wouldn't accept.

So, after many unsuccessful attempts to make a 'decision for Christ' which would work and be permanent, towards the end of my teens I made a trembly, guilt-ridden withdrawal from Church. In deep conflict, I came to the conclusion that I was an anomaly who must seek his ideal through some other means.

I became, like so many other conscientious young people of the Depression 1930's, for a time a parlour pink. Those reactionaries who held all the positions of power were responsible for the decay of human morality and idealism which had resulted in the closed factories, the joblessness, the loss of opportunity for young people. Clean, clear-eyed liberals should take over and establish a new order. I was all for equalitarianism, having not yet learned that radicalism quickly turns to conservatism once the ends it struggles to achieve are well in hand. It was being witness to a row over who was to be boss of the local chapter of the League for Industrial Democracy when I was a sophomore in college that first made me wonder about the validity of the equalitarian ideal. And later, overhearing the same slogans about capitalists I had

previously used applied to me when I had struggled up to become one of the executives in a new publishing business, put an abrupt end to my socialistic pretensions.

Expressionism swindled me a little longer. The company I was with published personnel tests. We worked with some of the most able educators and psychotherapists in the country. The idea behind psychology then as now was that the route to personal adjustment is through the natural expression of human interests and appetites. (Today, in the age of the sputniks, when the values of individual discipline and self-restraint are being rediscovered, the silliness of this idea is beginning to be seen.) I grew to know some of our authors quite well; and it is true, they practised what they preached; they expressed themselves, or tried to. But they didn't seem to be very happy, and the correlation which should have been manifest between expressionism and adjustment appeared to be lacking. And when I chanced to be told one day by the manager of the hotel where the American Psychological Association was holding its annual meeting that we psychologists were acting away from home about as badly as had the Legionnaires when they had had their convention in that same place a few months before, I began to wonder if I was not engaged in a rather dubious quest.

But even still, perhaps I was doing something worth while. I was serving in the field of the social sciences. Even if I was becoming more unhappy and my restlessness of mind and fear of the future were growing, perhaps I had to sacrifice myself for the good of others less gifted, less well positioned to do good than I. For were not we human adjustment workers attempting to found a new dispensation through research—through the discovery of the laws of human dynamics and the application of psychological techniques as a means for a happy, scientifically balanced life for all mankind? As matter had been broken down into components, which could be combined as a master fabricator might desire, so we would do the same with the stuff of human personality, taking people apart and putting them back together again in far better designs than nature had been able to produce.

I saw power in the hands of what we called enlightened men, or variously, the dedicated men of science, as the best plan for running things. I was, of course, one of these. Might, under our all-wise management, could make right. (We were, as can be seen, latter-day New Deal, or Rooseveltian, in our philosophy.) Indeed, having somehow worked, fought, and successfully gambled my way to the position of a little power, I scorned those to whom the status drive was not important. How could anyone fulfil himself without power? Did not the breakdowns, even suicides, of pure but ineffectual men one was always hearing about demonstrate this? You could see examples everywhere: the uselessness of the teacher who was not popular; the poor showing of the business worker who was not 'mobility-minded', the failure to get research grants by university persons who were not working in applied fields. It was a rough-and-tumble existence, this scramble for place, this concern with stratagems necessary to consolidate and hold it. But it could be looked upon as a noble crusade: selfishness that was truly selflessness. For when one was powerful enough, just think then of what great humanitarian things he could do!

But, struggle as I would against it, the nibbling hint crept in that this might be just a gigantic rationalization. Nobody ever seemed to reach quite that place of power where he would stop and be fully altruistic. In fact, the tide seemed to run in the opposite direction. I was one of the patricians, but was I enlightened? Did I have, actually, the slightest interest in anything but my own comfort and safety? Truly, self-interest was my only genuine concern, and it was enlarging.

And I saw a similar pattern evolving in the lives of many of the other successful people I knew—social scientists, educators, psychologists, world-helpers of every kind. Furthermore, it wasn't even certain that our social science would work. For as material atoms are found, when analysed, always to slip away and change into something else, so with human factors. People, I saw as I studied deeper into the theory and practice of our discipline, are too complex, and they never stay put. The effects of moods, of environments, of associates, even of a would-be therapist, are

always modifying them. I began to wonder whether any genuine science of human engineering based on analysis could ever be evolved.

The best proof would be a social scientist who was himself well adjusted, or someone who had been perfected through psychological techniques. I was tired of listening to theorizing as to what great things our programmes might do. I wanted to see someone somewhere who was a proper result of what we preached. It was at this point that I met Harry Hopkins. It was a thrilling moment. He had always been my ideal. A trained social worker, a man who had gone through a lengthy psychiatric analysis, he also had had enormous power to put into practice many of the same ideas we supported. He had been in charge of some of the largest social engineering projects ever undertaken. I sat beside Harry Hopkins for several hours in a Pullman 'chair car' travelling from Washington to New York. It was in July of 1945. Hopkins had just returned from his trip as President Truman's emissary to Stalin to try to settle the vexing problem of Poland's independence. Here was a man who at the height of his life should have something hopeful to tell me about scientific humanitarianism. I questioned Hopkins closely and he answered frankly. And what did he have to say? That he was defeated; that he could see no hope for mankind, no solution anywhere. He was a man sunk in the deepest despair.

Perhaps I should not have been shocked, but I was. And I recalled the other older men I knew. As young persons they were said to have been courageous and idealistic. But even when successful, as old men they had become hopeless and defeated, without belief, without peace. History was full of such examples. Was this what we were here for—to grow old and disillusioned? Life couldn't be designed as such a bad joke as this; there must be something perfect and clean somewhere.

Eventually I concluded that for both an end to believe in and an influence to help me towards it, I was looking in the wrong place. My heart told me salvation must be somewhere back in the

field of religion; but where? I was disenchanted with my childhood's faith. The preachings of the available New Thought sects with their emphasis on sweetness and positive thinking seemed mushy. Roman Catholicism certainly had much to recommend it; but how could spiritual liberation be gained through the legislation of aspiration and results? I shopped in Episcopalianism, even contemplating the joining of an Anglican monastic order; but here again the creed seemed illogical to me. And never anywhere in all my searches did I find a representative of God whom I felt knew experientially much of what he was talking about.

It was then that the publications of Vedanta came to my attention: Christopher Isherwood's *Vedanta for the Western World*; Aldous Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy*; Swami Prabhavananda's translation of the Bhagavad-Gita, with its classic introduction by Huxley. And I began to read again the New Testament, with opened eyes: 'And he said to them all, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gains the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?'

A new world of understanding began to open up. I came to see that I was sick of myself and that everything I had been trying to do had actually been self-centred. No matter what labels I put on my efforts, they were all organized to give me money or status or sensate satisfaction. I saw that the cause of frustration is the wish to get ego-fulfilment, possessions, pleasure. The route to peace of mind is self-abnegation, the systematic restraining of one's identification with matter, and the re-identification with spirit. This pursuit is what we in the West once knew to constitute religion but which—now that religion has become mainly instruction in ethical living—at present is termed mysticism. If I had been born a thousand years before I was I could have found what I wanted in the Christian tradition. But now, even though I was somewhat repelled by things Oriental, and the word 'Hinduism' scared me stiff, I had to conclude that what I

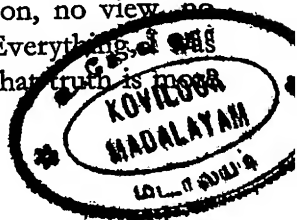
must have been available only through a religious journey to the East.

So I went to Southern California and to the Vedanta Society there; and I met Swami Prabhavananda and began to take instruction from him. Eventually I went on to become a monastic probationer, and after some years took the first vows of the Ramakrishna Order and was made a brahmachari.

For a person like me, Vedanta was at last the right answer. For people of this day and age who really want religion, but for one reason or another cannot find fulfilment in the faith of their heritage, it offers much. I listed earlier five stumbling-blocks I found in the faith in which I was brought up. I shall mention them again and show how Vedanta met these problems. In doing so I shall examine further what Vedanta is and what it means to me. In the discovery of and attempts to practise this religion—as in my attempts to find a way of life outside of religion—my experiences, I feel, are fairly representative.

I had been troubled, first, by the conflicting claims of the many religions and sects. If everyone claims that he has truth, and the claims are not synonymous, can anyone have it? It just made you wonder whether anyone had or could have the truth, for what could be more discouraging to the innocent seeker of truth than the dissimulation that goes on in its support?

The Semitic tradition, for some reason unknown, seems to be constitutionally exclusive. In the history of Christianity, Judaism, and Mohammedanism, fanaticism is a prominent feature. So with Western philosophy. The Occidental mind is for ever attempting to find and establish truths that are absolute, unassailable, subject to no contradiction. Indian thought, on the contrary, I found out, claims that all sorts of seemingly conflicting things can all be true at the same time, for such kinds of truths, verbally established, are relative. In studying Vedanta, I was bewildered first, and then comforted, to find that no action, no view, no position is especially right or wrong by itself. Everything, as is often told, 'depends'. It can only be said that that truth is more



true than another which leads more directly than the other towards higher truth. Accept the ideas of the heterodox; respect superstition; permit the beliefs of your opponent. These, like yours, are provisional, representing stages. Welcome all contradictions; they may be somebody's truths to live by.

But there is a Truth which is not relative, and that is that we are God. The evolution which is occurring is man's progress from the belief that he is separate and individual, in his state of relativity, to the certainty that he is one with God, in which he goes beyond relativity, beyond truth and untruth. But this, we are told, is a state never arrived at rationally, but experienced, realized.

This concept of Vedanta gave me the formula needed for viewing conflicting religious claims. I could turn to religion with a broad spirit, without supporting any new provincialism, such as had driven me away in the first place. One may approach the top of a mountain from any side. But when the summit is reached, pathways merge. Climbers may be far apart when they are in the foothills of theology, ritualistic observances, or organizational practices. Climatic and geographical causes, historic factors, and group temperaments all make for different starting-points. And that is good. It adds to the richness of the pageant. Is life in this world not more delectable for the varied contributions of Buddhism, Judaism, Confucianism, or indeed even, say, of Buchmanism, Tantra, and Theosophy? How artistic that there should be room for such variety—how rich the texture is, and how much more interesting than if the Almighty had decreed one antiseptically safe, exclusive, orthodox way. Although He is Unity, God finds, it seems, His recreation in variety!

But the realization of the highest truth—the Truth that is 'truest of the true'—is all the same realization. For God, when He is found, the avatars and saints tell us, is One, the One without a second. If anyone will compare their statements about this, as Aldous Huxley did in his *The Perennial Philosophy*, he must agree. Or if one wants experimental data from one who proceeded in a scientific spirit, there are the well-documented findings about Sri Ramakrishna, who followed in all orthodoxy one after another

the world's great religious paths, reaching the same God equally by way of each.

Second, I grew to see that perfection is most unlikely to come instantaneously; and it is illogical to expect that it should. Do we produce new tissue all of a sudden, become piano virtuosos or figure skaters in an instant, or reach health, after we have been sick, in a flash? Do we find any development in nature occurring without struggle, effort, time? The fabric of the mind, I saw, is remade most slowly of all. Hence yoga—a word and practice I had formerly shied away from as denoting something in objectionable taste—became to me a course in self-improvement. Adjustable to individual leanings, yoga provided a variety of practices for the slow remodelling of the mind and discovery of the Pure Spirit. By recollectedness, by meditation, by repetition of the Lord's name, by selfless work and abnegation, one might, I began to see, slowly turn one's moment-to-moment existence into a freeing sacrament.

Third, about individual differences—the inequities we find between people and Christianity's unsatisfactory explanation of them. Through its rejection of the doctrines of reincarnation and karma in the fourth century, Christianity fashioned for itself, it seems to me, a trap from which it was never able later to escape. To me reincarnation and karma seemed, the first time I heard of them, most sensible. They tie in with science and explain individual differences wonderfully: all results have a cause; my present condition is the result of what I have been, what I have really wished for; and I may govern my own future by what I am, by what I wish for, now. Thus responsibility is put on the individual instead of on others, on God, or on some ambiguous fate.

And you have, with reincarnation and karma, a reasonable basis for social theory. We may say that all men are born free and equal; but the evidence of our eyes tells us that they are not. Still, the idealistic man is repelled by class, desires to be equalitarian in outlook. Where reincarnation and karma are accepted he can be. The criterion of rank is spiritual unfoldment. Divinity is manifested more in some than in others, and that man is most estimable

in whom it is unfolded most. The real aristocrat is the saint, the plebeian the person of minor spiritual evolution. This is where the emphasis of class should be. But every man is equally the repository of the identical indwelling spirit, and must be respected as such.

Fourth, about religion and history.

Nearly everyone will admit now that we have come to a queer time—of vulgarity, of disillusionment, of social and psychological dislocation. After fifteen hundred years of trying to build Augustine's City of God, Western man has reached a point where he can see that he has done nothing of the kind, and perhaps question at last the familiar straight-line theory of history.

Yet there was for a while a kind of kingdom of heaven on earth in the West, a social-spiritual youth and flowering. Henry Adams in his *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* describes its two-hundred-year-long prime. Then there was a cohesiveness to life and an altitude in personality that makes the modern student of those times sigh with homesickness: 'The whole Mount still kept the grand style; it expressed the unity of Church and State, God and Man, Peace and War, Life and Death, Good and Bad; it solved the whole problem of the universe. The priest and the soldier were both at home here, in 1215 as in 1115, or in 1058; the politician was not outside it; the sinner was welcome; the poet was made happy in his own spirit, with a sympathy, almost an affection, that suggests a habit of verse in the Abbot as well as in the architect. God reconciles all. The world is an evident, obvious, sacred harmony.'

But that was long ago. By the time of the Renaissance the tide had reached its crest and was beginning to fall back, to run away in a thousand rivulets which no one could ever rechannel into one stream again. The Catholic Church tried. But religion had become institutionalized and dogmatic—unable to adapt itself to changing needs. As more screens of time and human interpretation came down between man and the original Christ, spiritual ardour lessened. The effect of Christianity in shaping faith and morals diminished almost to the vanishing-point. The Church split up,

philosophy went off in various directions, and eventually naturalism appeared as the prevailing viewpoint. Organized Christianity went firmly on, as though nothing had happened; but actually religion in the West by the sixteenth or seventeenth century had very little influence on life. Most thought which really impelled action stemmed, as it does today, from naturalistic assumptions.

This was the way I saw what had occurred, and the concept of historical cycles seemed far more logical to me than the theory of straight-line progress. It was clear that a scheme of rise and fall was the law of life. The cyclical theory was prominent in Greek thought. Some good historians had supported it in the modern period: Giambattista Vico in the early-eighteenth century, and Brooks Adams, Oswald Spengler, and Arnold Toynbee in our time. The configuration of a culture's life may be compared to an oblique S. There is the commencement, a deliberate rise, the rapid ascent to a height, then the long tapering off. This cyclic view of history explained where we are today and how we got here. It also explained the mystery of the many earlier civilizations which have been but are no more: the glory that was Rome—and Greece—and Egypt—and Vedic India—and ancient China—and probably countless more.

This was how, by the time I reached Vedanta, I had come to view history. It was only needed for Vedanta to supply the missing *modus operandi*—what makes a new culture rise in the first place. I saw it at once. The massive unifying force which produces a new culture is the revelation, the life on earth, of a son of God. It is the advent of a saint or incarnation which inspires a new flowering.

Vedanta has taught from time immemorial that God reappears on earth at those sterile times when goodness grows weak and evil increases. Then He makes Himself a body and returns, to establish righteousness and to deliver the God-seeker. To an agrarian culture God came as a charming shepherd boy, in the form of Krishna. The hard-shelled formalism of the day was broken, as ecstatic love for God flowed once again. In a civilization of feudalism He appeared as an ideal young prince, who

renounced to become the ascetic Rama. His preaching at a period when faith had been strangled by a decadent priestcraft was: Be a lamp unto yourself. Up and down the Judea of Caesar's age he walked as a familiar kind of prophet, but with a new message that was to replace obedience with charity, a shopkeeping ethics with love. Many more appearances have been recorded. It is even said that in times far gone by, when life was all aquatic, the Lord swam the world's oceans as a superb, exemplary fish!

Considering the modern state of the Christian culture, I was prepared to believe it was time for God to come anew. Again Vedanta supplied the needed ingredient. It said that He had. Vulgarities *has* taken over sufficiently; fracturing *has* run its extreme length. About the time Chester A. Arthur was President of the United States, God was giving out the message that would start a new civilization. He was here, in one of his innumerable second comings, living just north of Calcutta. Just on the eve of the development of instantaneous means of communication and speedy transportation—when the world had become one in time and space and must become one in spirit—He had introduced the new motif of harmony.

I congratulated myself that I was in on it. Somehow I had been lucky enough, in rejecting the last fragments of the final tapering off of the old curve, to have landed astride the rising stroke of the brand-new S. A most entrancing moment in which to be alive! To know where one is in history is good. To be able to see what is going to happen next is also good. And to be alive at one of the turning-points of man's fate—that is best of all!

And fifth, about my old problem of good and evil.

Some years ago, when Christopher Isherwood was living at the Hollywood Vedanta Society, and editing the Society's magazine, he wrote a fanciful little piece—I suspect to fill some last-minute gap in an issue—on the Kalpataru or wish-fulfilling tree of Indian fable.

Some children are gathered on a lawn with their uncle. He tells them of this magic tree: 'If you speak to it and tell it a wish;

or if you lie down under it and think, or even dream a wish, then that wish will be granted.' It seems that the uncle has imported such a tree in years gone by and set it up in the garden. 'In fact,' he tells them, 'that is a Kalpataru over there.'

So the children try out the magic of the tree. They run to the Kalpataru and, looking up into its serene branches, address to it all their desires. Most of the wishes are very unwise. Many of them end, Isherwood tells us, 'in indigestion or tears'. But the wishing tree fulfils them just the same; it is not interested in giving good advice.

Years pass. The children are all men and women now. They have long since forgotten the Kalpataru in uncle's garden. They have found new wishes and are trying to fulfil them. At first the aim of their lives is to get these wishes granted; but later on it is just the opposite. The whole effort finally is to find wishes which will be very hard—even impossible—to fulfil.

What we are to understand is that the whole Creation is a giant Wishing Tree. A branch of it extends into every heart. Whatever longing rises there, some force, some justice, operates so that sometime or other—in this life or the next—it will be granted. Granted, yes—along with its attendant retinue of consequences.

But one of the children who had clustered on the lawn, the story concludes, did not spend his life running from desire to desire, from fulfilment to fulfilment. For since that first time, he had understood the real nature of the Wishing Tree. 'For him, the Kalpataru was not the pretty magic tree of his uncle's story—it did not exist to grant the stupid wishes of children—it was unspeakably terrible and grand. It was his father and his mother. Its roots held the world together, and its branches reached beyond the stars. Before the beginning it had been—and would be, always.'

Yes, Vedanta tells us that the whole creation is a giant Wishing Tree. Whatever desire we entertain must eventually be granted—along with its accompanying retinue of consequences. There's the rub—the retinue of consequences: life's indigestions and tears.

Yet as I studied Vedanta I found this idea just, practical, and

intellectually satisfying. We may—we must—have everything we want. In fact, this creation is nothing but our dreams in substantial form; and one's own condition in it something he himself has ordained—a vehicle his soul has fashioned best capable of travelling the trails his desires have laid down, qualified, of course, by the consequences.

Unfortunately, the universe we see is relative. It is not good or bad; it is just relative. The Indian term for it is *maya*. It is built up of pairs of opposites: pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, fulfillment and frustration. To claim the pleasant is to gain, equally, the painful; to grasp joy is, as well, to hold sorrow. We find this out; we have disappointment after disappointment. Yet we go on seeking the good; we go on wishing. We cannot do otherwise, for something in us will not give up; something in us goes on commanding us to gain the perfect joy.

That motivation, Vedanta told me, is the longing to know God. We don't know that's what it is, for *maya* has covered our real Self. But it is the hunger to know God that produces this restless search through many lives. Every movement of the heart is an obscured wish for God. We don't know it, but that's what it is. The drunkard's search for bliss is a search for God. Human love is would-be mystic union. The famine for delight, for experience, for meaning—all the fluttering of the bird that would escape to a larger air. We keep trying to reach the sun by climbing up every lamp-post.

Eventually you catch on to the swindle. Finally, after you have tried everything and gained the same result, for perhaps the hundredth or the thousandth time, in sheer exhaustion you give up attempting to find the absolute in the relative. That, I learned, is what is called the dawning of discrimination. You perceive at last what bad is, if there is such a thing: it is the ignorant hunt for light in the shadows; it is confusion of the relative with the Real: it is false identification. You grasp at last—again if there is such a thing—what good is too: anything which helps to break the hallucination; anything that shatters the apparent so that the Real may shine forth. Then you reach out to catch the mind and wrestle

with it, and wrestle again strongly, and hold it back from its running. That is what renunciation is. And the way you get the strength to reverse the direction of your mind, and the skill, is through meditation. Meditation is creation in reverse—a de-hypnotizing process.

But the Indian is a gentle psychologist. Self-abnegation is a goal, but it is reached through maturation. No stunning, Puritanical resolutions; no jarring, painful abstentions! Work not against the momentum of the soul, but with it. Indeed, let the Wishing Tree do all the work!

Let the Wishing Tree do all the work! Wish the right wish, and the Kalpataru will do everything for you. What a good plan! The idea is caught in the words of a song by the eighteenth-century Bengali minstrel, Ramprasad:

Let us go for a walk, O mind,
To the Wishing Tree,
There to pluck life's four fruits.

Let us go for a walk. Life is a course. It may be a frantic scramble through the nonsense aisles of a labyrinth; or, if we hunt out and find the straight path, it can lead directly to our realization.

To the Wishing Tree. The Kalpataru will be for you what you see it to be, as it will grant the wishes you put to it. Seen as such, the Tree is maya, and will accede to all relative demands dreamed beneath it. Seen as God, the Tree is God, answering equally your earnest entreaty for perfection. If you see it as God manifested, you will have found here and now the perfect joy.

There to pluck life's four fruits. In referring in his song to the four fruits, Ramprasad was using a philosophical concept common in India from ancient times. It is said in Hinduism that there are four great life satisfactions to which every man is entitled, called in Sanskrit: dharma, artha, kama, and moksha; or status, prosperity, pleasure, and liberation. The first three are of one category, and the fourth of another. We have the right, in claiming the first three, to experience the good things of this life, and sooner or later every man will experience them—because they are his due,

so that finally he can give them up. We must have experience in order to see that it is not experience that we are looking for. It is then that a man is ready to reach for the fourth fruit, his liberation.

God thus, according to Vedanta, does not permit good and evil. He has nothing to do with such matters. Where relativity is, He is not. Where He is, relativity is not. Take your choice; if you choose relativity, do not try to involve God in it. If you choose God—and in time each man will—you will no longer weep about this good and evil.

This appealed to me as satisfactory and logical.

We are told that even status, prosperity, and pleasure, if seen as benefits from Him, can prepare the mind for liberation. If you wish for status, seek it in order that you may serve righteousness. If it is prosperity you want and get, realize it is only a gift, and be generous in turn. When you are enjoying pleasure, be mindful that it is thanks to the larger bliss that the reflection you see is vouchsafed you. Eating the first three fruits with God in your mind will bring you more easily to consumption of the fourth.

Wish for the first three so that you may experience them and have done with them. Then wish for the fourth. A little struggle is necessary truly to do so, because we have grown so used to contenting ourselves with the preliminary three. But, I was told, the dream strengthens after a while, and then the Wishing Tree takes over and does all the work. They say that even wishing leaves off then. Like the one boy in the story, your desire then can be only to be near the tree. Fruit and plucking are forgotten, they say, in its magic circle. You have only to love the tree, like the boy in the story, and you will have everything; you will never have to wish again, ever, any more.

What I have been saying in the foregoing is that Vedanta appealed to me because it is so attractive rationally. It allows one to be cosmopolitan, permissive, broad. It furnishes a psychologically sound programme for personal growth and development. Its tenets square with reason and with the discoveries of

modern science and provide a basis for equitable social practice. It illumines history. And Vedanta copes successfully with the problem of evil.

But Vedanta must mean more than this. For after the mind has been satisfied and practice becomes the main concern, vain arguments must leave off; then the wait for the movement of the heart must begin.

Once, when upset about some terrible and seemingly meaningless trouble that had come into another's life, I spat out to Swami Prabhavananda: 'What a mess! How poorly God designed this universe. The most ignorant of us could have done it better.'

Swami's quiet, compassionate response was: 'No. He designed it very well; because the way He designed it brings us to Him.'

All life is a struggling upward. The vulture tearing at dead flesh, the liar trying to improve his situation through falsehood, the highwayman robbing to get comforts for his wife and children; each is aspiring to something better than he has known; and each I have been. So with the madman, the murderer, the philanderer. The dilettante socialist, the half-hearted Freudian, the would-be scientific humanitarian; I was these, too, in this latest life. I will not apologize, and I cannot regret, because through all the foolishness I have committed I have come to be what I am now—a spiritual aspirant. But I do not want to get stuck at any of the old levels or repeat any of the old nonsense; the value of all this has been taken. I want to keep struggling up.

Why does the world exist? At the top of the ascent is the Godman, serene in the enjoyment of Truth. All experience is to make each of us someday such a man.

Why does the world exist? That is like asking why the first acts of a play exist: to make possible the climax. This world drama was composed to provide a meeting at last between lover and beloved. The scenes of comedy and joy; the stretches of stupid melodrama; the episodes of tragedy; the sub-plots and false climaxes—all are necessary to build up the suspense. The true lover takes pleasure in making his way through difficulties. God has created the world of appearance as a mass of stumbling blocks

which thicken the plot, past which the lover must fight his way, to make the final consummation the more sweet. This world exists for the purpose of heightening the joy of union.

Hence the most precious thing Vedanta means to me is *example*: the perfect yogin at the top of the ascent, the lover who has found bliss—in short, the knower of God. I know now that this is what I always wanted to be. All my blunders were trial-and-error searches to find the way to God. I didn't know how to begin and nobody seemed able to tell me. But Vedanta gave direction to the search. I have seen that perfection is possible and I have been told how to move towards it. I have come to know my ancient hope was not ill-founded. Vedanta says that perfection is man's birthright and that it is attainable. I am convinced that this is true, because I have beheld some who are perfect.

As a youngster I tried to approach one of these in Christ. But all the bad things that interpretation by the ignorant and compromise by the lazy do barred me from Him. Vedanta gave Him back, uniting my adult understanding with my childish idolization, healing the psychic wound. As if some scroll of His teachings from a lost Dead Sea scroll, handwritten by Jesus Christ Himself, had been brought forth and given me, so it was when I read the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. At last I could draw close to the Eternal Christ. And in meeting a few who are the disciples of His disciples, I established a saving relationship, as it were, with the divine Apostles.

This is what I mean by *example*. I know that perfection is possible because I have seen it operational in the lives of recent and living people. This convinces me that I may find it too; and this is all that is worth working towards. I may proceed in growing wisdom to old age and face death with equanimity. I may seek my ideal and through grace attain it.

Vedanta means to me that the immemorial ideal that has driven me from level to level is in fact attainable. The primeval dream of freedom can come true. Vedanta means to me that the intimations of perfection which have stirred in me these many lives have always pointed towards something which can come to pass.

Joan Rayne

I AM a probationer nun of the Ramakrishna Order of India, and I live in the Hollywood convent of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, which is one of several American branches of this Order. I have been asked to explain how and why I became a Vedantist. The question 'how' can be answered quite straightforwardly, and I hope will be, but the 'why' of it all remains to this day a mystery which the writer has been unable to solve. I do not have the conceited notion that I know myself sufficiently well to set down a number of cut and dried reasons which could explain satisfactorily why I, personally, have adopted this way of life. I shall cover the major events of my life which appear to me to be relevant to the topic, but I am aware that a number of my motives and reactions are totally unaccountable. Logic was never conspicuous in governing my behaviour, and I do not doubt that a character in a work of fiction might read more plausibly than the subject of this autobiography.

What brings a person to Vedanta or, for that matter, to the spiritual life at all? I am not here concerned with the individual who merely accepts intellectually its philosophy, since such acceptance does not necessarily alter a man's mode of life, but with the person whose aims, ideals, and way of living have been considerably modified by his attempt to put his beliefs into practice. In seeking an answer to such a question one might justifiably risk a generalization and state that anyone who comes to Vedanta and tries to live by it does so because he has discovered that the rewards of the world are not sufficiently satisfying. This is a trite observation, but valid enough for me to use as the theme on which I propose to weave my own variations.

I was born in London, and always possessed material advantages which many people spend their lives trying to acquire. My father was a prominent shoe manufacturer, and my mother, American by birth, was a well-known prima donna who, at the height of her career, was forced to give up singing owing to the sudden onset of incurable, though not total, deafness. I can still remember the occasion shortly before this happened of her last recital at the Albert Hall. It may be relevant here to remark in passing that before she made her debut in grand opera in Italy, my mother had been a pupil of Emma Thursby who, we learn from Swami Vivekananda's published letters, attended his lectures regularly in New York.

I was educated at a fashionable private school in London, and later attended finishing schools in Switzerland and Paris. In 1938 I went through the social whirl known as 'coming out', and in accordance with this tradition spent several exhausting months attending dances, cocktail parties, formal dinners, and race meetings. The climax of the season came when I was taken to Buckingham Palace and presented at Court; my mother and I were bedecked in ostrich plumes and long trains, while my father wore ill-fitting knee breeches. Towards the end of a long evening I made a somewhat wobbly curtsy in front of King George VI, and the monarch acknowledged my salutation with a nod and a suppressed yawn.

In the fall of that same year a new phase of my life began. I wanted to be an actress, so I enrolled as a student at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. This renowned institution has, as everybody knows, nurtured the talents of such luminaries as John Gielgud and Charles Laughton, but it could do little with me. I was not even a bad actress; I was mediocre. At the end of my training, which lasted two years, I appeared several times in a rather arty London night-club, the Player's Theatre, in a Victorian burlesque revue, doing comic character monologues that I wrote myself, somewhat on the order of Ruth Draper, but there the comparison ends. I also played small parts in a number of films. It was the excruciating embarrassment I experienced while watch-

ing myself in the movies that caused me to abandon acting. I could see that I was really dreadful. I was still stage-struck, however, so I turned my attention to writing plays, an occupation for which I was persuaded I had at least a little talent.

The war had been on for two years. I was writing, and at the same time working as a volunteer at the Canadian Red Cross Society when, in 1942, military conscription for women was introduced in England. Before I knew where I was, I found myself drafted into the A.T.S., the women's branch of the army. I was stationed on an anti-aircraft gun-site near the London docks as a radar operator. I cannot help feeling that it was fortunate that by this time the blitz was over and air raids infrequent, since had the defence of London depended to any extent on our battery the Battle of Britain might well have been lost. Our guns were never known to hit an enemy target even by chance, although we once brought down a Blimp barrage balloon which fell in the main street of Tilbury. On another occasion we incurred the wrath of R.A.F. Headquarters for opening fire on a squadron of Allied planes. After a year and a half of inglorious service, I developed serious eye trouble and was discharged unprotestingly on medical grounds.

During the remaining war years and indeed for some time afterwards I went on writing and having what I considered a good time. Among my stereotyped enjoyments may be listed eating at smart restaurants, joining clubs where I played bridge and poker for more than I could afford, phoning bookmakers and placing sizeable bets on the horses, attending first nights, reading everything I could lay my hands on, from Agatha Christie to Hegel, going to concerts, art galleries, and night-clubs. Then there were motor trips on the Continent, vacations in the South of France, visiting Paris, Miami, and Florence for prolonged stays. I was unhappy most of the time, but believed that all would be well once I was established as a successful dramatist, a sort of female Noël Coward!

My craving for excitement caused me to embark upon a very nearly disastrous venture—that of going into theatre management

with a friend. We formed ourselves into a legal partnership, duly registered in the City, and became producers in the West End of London. It was directly from this experience that I came to the Vedanta Society of Southern California. I am aware that the *non sequitur* here is startling and demands further explanation.

Now I have dealt so far with external events only. But what was going on inside me all these years? I like to believe that I was not quite so silly as the foregoing account of my behaviour would imply. Anyway, I will go over this catalogue of events again and parallel them with a few deeper probings—a sort of modified spiritual autobiography—without which the subject of this article will never come to life.

What are the most important influences during one's formative years? The people one meets and the books one reads, most probably. Human beings might be roughly divided into two groups—those who cannot be influenced and those who can. The individual belonging to the first group is like a streetcar; he obediently travels along the grooves laid out for him by circumstances and from his late teens onwards his life, within limitations, is entirely predictable. He is the conformer, the conventional man whose views and mode of life, patterned on those of the community into which he was born, become set at quite an early age. From then on he is immune to any influence of an alien nature; he does not deviate from the route charted for him by heredity and environment, and with his rubber-stamp, rigid opinions gives the impression of never having entertained the slightest doubt about anything which he has accepted as right and fit. So much for the streetcar. Opposed to this reliable vehicle is the member of the second group, who rather resembles a wayward bus at the mercy of a capricious driver; halting places are uncertain, route and destination subject to alteration without notice. Such a person is impressionable, suggestible and, because uncertain, open to influence. I think I must belong to this second group.

My background, as we have seen, was conventional, and so were my behaviour and mental outlook up to the age of twenty

or so. My parents were Church of England, and they saw to it that as a child I attended Sunday school regularly, weather permitting. This always bored me to death, but somehow I felt that in going to church at all I was performing a good deed for which God would reward me. My conception of the Almighty was a hazy confusion between Santa Claus and an irascible, clairvoyant schoolmaster; he had given me all my blessings—nice parents, nice home, nice toys—but was capable of taking them away at the drop of a hat if I misbehaved too much or neglected to placate Him by saying my prayers regularly.

When I was about twenty I read Ouspensky's *A New Model of the Universe* and was immediately attracted by the passages describing higher states of consciousness. I do not know why. This was the first time I had ever heard or read anything about mysticism, and I was genuinely intrigued.

I was an avid reader and something of an intellectual snob. My father allowed me to use his membership card at the world-famous London Library, where one could take out fourteen books at a time and keep them for several months. In a desultory way I read much of Western philosophy, left-wing politics, and aesthetics. I do not know what I was trying to get out of all this; I suppose such information as I managed to acquire ministered to my self-esteem more than anything. I looked down on people who had no appreciation of art, drama, music, and all the other 'higher things of life'.

In 1940 I was playing a small part in a film for Sir Carol Reed when I met an actor (he has since become a well-known producer of problem plays, social dramas, and dimly lighted revivals of Strindberg and Ibsen) who profoundly influenced my attitude towards both religion and politics. An avowed atheist and a fluent talker, he wrote articles for the rationalist journal *The Freethinker*. Like so many of his kind, he was also a socialist, and as a freelance journalist his diatribes frequently found publication in left-wing newspapers. So, in the studio dining room and while hanging around the set between shots, he indoctrinated me with his heretical convictions, quoting Thomas Paine, Shaw, Ingersoll,

Haldane, Laski, and others. I was impressed, and before the film was completed I had stopped reciting my nightly prayers. Of course I lacked the discrimination at the time to realize that he and his colleagues were attacking organized religions and their theologies, and not touching at all upon the core of any faith. But his arguments seemed watertight and I accepted them.

I became and remained for some years a rabid atheist and socialist. I did not keep my views to myself. I bombarded everyone I knew with questions about their religious beliefs, and if they were so misguided as to admit to any I harangued them mercilessly. This militant tendency of mine was a source of embarrassment to my parents whenever they gave a party and I was present. On one occasion I lent a copy of Bernard Shaw's *An Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism* to a Woolworth heiress of our acquaintance whose husband was a Tory Member of Parliament, and when she returned it a few days later with the excuse that she had not had time to finish it, I remarked that the title of the book alone should have dissuaded me from forcing it upon her in the first place. I gained the reputation of holding 'strong views'. Young men who took me out to dine and dance and thus pass a pleasant evening found themselves called upon to defend their religious and political persuasions. Many times I sat up till dawn in a nightclub sharing a bottle of Scotch with friends, and holding forth on why it was ridiculous to believe in either God or the Conservative Government. I only repeated like a parrot what I'd read or heard, of course, but many of my listeners did not know this and thought that I was intelligent, which was what I intended.

Actually, my opinions formed a bundle of half-baked nonsense, and expressing them merely provided me with an intellectual kick. None of it sank deep. When we are young we will embrace with vehemence causes and beliefs for which a year later we would not even be bothered to cross the street. But how seriously we take ourselves at the time!

My socialistic sympathies died abruptly when I was drafted into the army; my championing of the masses ceased when I had to live with them. My interest in politics waned. I was still in the

army when I came across my second book on mysticism, Kenneth Walker's *Diagnosis of Man*. In it there are chapters on Vedanta, Buddhism, mystical Christianity, and yoga. The author is a Harley Street surgeon, and I was impressed by his sympathetic analysis of these subjects. This book stimulated me to read more deeply into the topics discussed, and I began to study books on Oriental philosophy. To this day I cannot explain why I, a supposed rationalist, should be instinctively drawn to literature dealing with mysticism and meditation—and that not with the idea of questioning its validity, but in complete acceptance.

After I was discharged from the army a new influence entered my life which was, I know, in an indirect way, responsible for my finally coming to the Vedanta Society. I had met a group of young people who lived together as a community headed by a remarkable man who was an Oriental. A versatile, dynamic personality, he was fond of entertaining and frequently played host to people prominent in theatrical, literary, political, and industrial circles. Of the intimate group that composed the community, about ten young men and women in all, two were Indian and the rest British. Among them were Oxford graduates, actresses, and law students. Like all of them, I was greatly drawn to the stimulating and unique man who was the *raison d'être* for the group as such, and I had the privilege of living in this community for several years. It still exists intact today; some of its members have been called to the Bar and are fully fledged barristers, and one of the girls is now a prominent star on the London stage. The leader of the group, whom I shall call X, in recent years played an important role behind the scenes in the government of his own country, to whose then Prime Minister he was unofficial adviser.

It is unusual to find a number of talented and individualistic people living in harmony under one roof. It is possible that readers acquainted with the late D. H. Lawrence and the group surrounding him might find an analogy here, providing that it is

not stretched too far. X knew how to develop a person's *potentialities* and talents to a surprising degree, and he helped me *immeasurably* with my writing. His guidance was by no means *confined to furthering* a person's career, however. Courageous, autocratic, and dominating, X was a merciless debunker of all forms of pretentiousness and insincerity, and he possessed an almost frightening insight into human nature. None of us living with him were exempt from his scathing verbal attacks, which were usually delivered in harangues in front of the rest of the group. I was self-opinionated and full of snap judgements on everything and everybody, and being argumentative by nature, my first impulse when criticized was to defend myself. But this always ended by my being torn to pieces, and in time I learned my lesson a little. No one could associate closely with X for long without being shaken at least to some extent out of one's conceit, stupidity, self-deception, and mediocrity. X was a hard taskmaster, but also a loving, patient, and understanding one. I shed many tears during those years, and I also knew a lot of happiness.

X had collected an immense library, and was knowledgeable on a variety of unrelated subjects. He could talk brilliantly about Buddhism, stocks and shares, cooking (in a New York restaurant there is a recipe of his own invention named after him), clothes, gemmology, the theatre, politics, philosophy, and the food-canning industry. He was born a Buddhist, but did not practise meditation or encourage it in any of us. I remember getting hold of a Buddhist book on concentration, and for several days secretly practising the exercise of gazing fixedly at an orange and then closing my eyes and trying to visualize it. But I soon grew bored and abandoned this activity. All through the years I was with X, I read spasmodically books on mysticism, and inside me there was a vague, half-hearted desire to 'do something about it'. But it is hard to practise any form of spiritual discipline in an inimical atmosphere, and the community's interest in Buddhism was primarily intellectual. Also the mode of life, with its nurture of individual talents, encouragement of ambition, appreciation of beauty, good food, stimulating conversation, and so on, appealed

largely to my worldly tendencies. But during this time my atheism had died a natural death, and although I had no spiritual conviction to take its place at least I was open-minded.

My reason for finally leaving X and the community was largely a rebellion against what I considered too much domination and a hankering to distinguish myself through my own unaided efforts. I had grown deeply attached to this family, and it cost me a severe emotional wrench to leave them. I had not been an easy person to live with; they had put up with a lot from me and loved me in spite of it all. I know that if in living at the Vedanta Society I do not experience too much difficulty in adjusting to community life, it is only because some at least of the rough edges were knocked off during the years with X. Also he had repeatedly tried to din into my understanding a more spiritual sense of values, but it was only years afterwards that the truth of what he said began to sink in and take effect. To acknowledge adequately my debt to him would be impossible.

I was on my own, and free to do more or less as I pleased. I continued my writing and several times stayed abroad for prolonged periods. I became increasingly overwhelmed by a sense of the emptiness and futility of my life and pursuits, and yet was unable to put my finger on the cause. I finally took what seemed to me a desperate measure: I consulted a psychiatrist. I went to him twice a week for one year. I kept a notebook in which I recorded my dreams, and these were discussed at each interview. I had all manner of problems, most of which I was aware of, all of which remained with me, and none of which bothered me especially. I was unhappy, yes, but I know now that I should never have gone to the good man in the first place, since what I needed was a reason for living at all—some kind of faith—and this he was powerless to give me. The psychiatrist was intelligent, sympathetic, sensitive, and extremely honest, because at the end of a year he refused to see me any more as he felt that he could do nothing for me.

I do not wish to criticize psychiatric therapy simply because it

not stretched too far. X knew how to develop a person's potentialities and talents to a surprising degree, and he helped me immeasurably with my writing. His guidance was by no means confined to furthering a person's career, however. Courageous, autocratic, and dominating, X was a merciless debunker of all forms of pretentiousness and insincerity, and he possessed an almost frightening insight into human nature. None of us living with him were exempt from his scathing verbal attacks, which were usually delivered in harangues in front of the rest of the group. I was self-opinionated and full of snap judgements on everything and everybody, and being argumentative by nature, my first impulse when criticized was to defend myself. But this always ended by my being torn to pieces, and in time I learned my lesson a little. No one could associate closely with X for long without being shaken at least to some extent out of one's conceit, stupidity, self-deception, and mediocrity. X was a hard taskmaster, but also a loving, patient, and understanding one. I shed many tears during those years, and I also knew a lot of happiness.

X had collected an immense library, and was knowledgeable on a variety of unrelated subjects. He could talk brilliantly about Buddhism, stocks and shares, cooking (in a New York restaurant there is a recipe of his own invention named after him), clothes, gemmology, the theatre, politics, philosophy, and the food-canning industry. He was born a Buddhist, but did not practise meditation or encourage it in any of us. I remember getting hold of a Buddhist book on concentration, and for several days secretly practising the exercise of gazing fixedly at an orange and then closing my eyes and trying to visualize it. But I soon grew bored and abandoned this activity. All through the years I was with X, I read spasmodically books on mysticism, and inside me there was a vague, half-hearted desire to 'do something about it'. But it is hard to practise any form of spiritual discipline in an inimical atmosphere, and the community's interest in Buddhism was primarily intellectual. Also the mode of life, with its nurture of individual talents, encouragement of ambition, appreciation of beauty, good food, stimulating conversation, and so on, appealed

largely to my worldly tendencies. But during this time my atheism had died a natural death, and although I had no spiritual conviction to take its place at least I was open-minded.

My reason for finally leaving X and the community was largely a rebellion against what I considered too much domination and a hankering to distinguish myself through my own unaided efforts. I had grown deeply attached to this family, and it cost me a severe emotional wrench to leave them. I had not been an easy person to live with; they had put up with a lot from me and loved me in spite of it all. I know that if in living at the Vedanta Society I do not experience too much difficulty in adjusting to community life, it is only because some at least of the rough edges were knocked off during the years with X. Also he had repeatedly tried to din into my understanding a more spiritual sense of values, but it was only years afterwards that the truth of what he said began to sink in and take effect. To acknowledge adequately my debt to him would be impossible.

I was on my own, and free to do more or less as I pleased. I continued my writing and several times stayed abroad for prolonged periods. I became increasingly overwhelmed by a sense of the emptiness and futility of my life and pursuits, and yet was unable to put my finger on the cause. I finally took what seemed to me a desperate measure: I consulted a psychiatrist. I went to him twice a week for one year. I kept a notebook in which I recorded my dreams, and these were discussed at each interview. I had all manner of problems, most of which I was aware of, all of which remained with me, and none of which bothered me especially. I was unhappy, yes, but I know now that I should never have gone to the good man in the first place, since what I needed was a reason for living at all—some kind of faith—and this he was powerless to give me. The psychiatrist was intelligent, sympathetic, sensitive, and extremely honest, because at the end of a year he refused to see me any more as he felt that he could do nothing for me.

I do not wish to criticize psychiatric therapy simply because it

did not work for me. I have known people who have been considerably helped by it, in the sense that they have been able to adapt better to their environment and meet fresh vicissitudes with a greater poise and confidence than before. Such a person is 'cured'. But this seems to me to be something of a dead end, and I always want to ask, 'Well, where do you go from here?' Such an individual has nothing bigger than himself to cling to, and such integration as he has gained from analysis seems rather shaky. He has paid large sums of money to be told that he is selfish, lonely, and frightened; a lot of dirt from the past is dug up, examined, and discussed until the patient can accept its implications with some degree of detachment, which means that he is adjusted to his own nastiness and everybody else's. He is fortunate if at the end of all this he has not become very absorbed in his own moods and reactions. In my own case I think that psychiatric treatment, while it did me no good, was at any rate quite harmless. It left me totally unchanged.

I decided to plunge into some absorbing activity that would keep me busy eighteen hours a day and give me no chance to be morbidly introspective. It was at this time that I went into the theatre management business (racket might be a more suitable word!) with a friend. We both put money into this project, and although we did not lose our shirts, they were nevertheless badly tattered. I was soon to learn that investing in theatrical enterprises was a bigger gamble than horse-racing!

I would not have missed this experience for the world, since it satisfied certain frustrations which had been gnawing at me for a long time. Many of us have desires and ambitions in life which are not intrinsically laudable and the satisfaction of which is guaranteed to bring us misery. To reason this out in advance and therefore to reject the desired experience is the height of discrimination, as is also the capacity to heed other people's warnings and to learn through their experience. But most of us are so pig-headed that we must live through an experience ourselves before we can see through it. There is nothing wrong in this if we are willing to accept the consequences. There is a Spanish proverb

which for its cold-blooded common sense is quite Vedantic in its acceptance of maya's pairs of opposites. It states: Take what you want and pay for it. The Vedantic implications of this terse dictum are immense. It takes for granted the law of karma, the fact that all passing satisfactions and worldly achievements are going to be paid for sooner or later by suffering in some form or another. I have said at the beginning of this article that it is my belief that individuals come to the spiritual life only when they find that worldly rewards are not enough. I would now further amplify this remark by suggesting that one becomes aware of the paucity of the rewards only in relation to the exorbitance of the bills presented, and in time one tires of paying black-market prices for everything. But the majority of people never wake up to the fact that they are being cheated and that they are not going to find the happiness they expect in the pursuit and achievement of this or that goal: in the face of repeated disappointments they continue to chase the mirage and foot the bill without resenting it too much. Such are the worldly people, to whom the game is still worth the candle.

To return to the theatre management episode. The word ambition can in many cases, I think, be used as a euphemistic synonym for frustration. It certainly could in mine. For a start, this enterprise gave me a sense of personal initiative which had been frustrated while living with the community in the shade of a dominating personality. Then, too, the management gave me the experience, although short-lived, of being treated as a little tin god. There is a childish craving within each one of us to be treated by other people with respect and admiration (whether real or simulated does not much matter), and the head of a theatre management in the West End of London is always regarded with some degree of awe until people realize that there is no more cash left. In my own case, there was never much real cash to lose, but most people did not know this. I have mentioned that my father was a well-known manufacturer of high-grade footwear for women, and there was hardly a theatre programme in London that did not bear the credit: Shoes by H. & M. Rayne. Everyone of course

thought that my family was very rich—forgetting the fact that owing to high taxation nobody was able to keep much of what was earned—and everybody believed that the non-existent Rayne millions were behind my venture. In actual fact my father, a shrewd man, had acquired through years of experience a hearty and well-founded distrust of the theatre business as such, and he discouraged me from the start. He said that if I stood on Waterloo Bridge and threw banknotes into the Thames I would stand a better chance of getting my money back than in what I was doing. I did not listen. I enjoyed the sense of power I got through hiring and firing people and being treated with deference by stars willing to appear in shows produced by our management.

Looking back, I find it quite alarming to realize how stupidly vain and egotistical I could become in such a situation. Intrigue, treachery, and unscrupulous practices that stop just this side of the law are the order of the day in the theatre business. I fell into all this without a qualm, and found it very exciting and stimulating for a while until I had time to sit back and analyse the situation.

Oddly enough, my leisure reading at this time—what little of it there was—consisted of Aldous Huxley's *Perennial Philosophy* and the Bhagavad-Gita. Of course my mode of life could not have been more at variance with what I read, but although I was busy and absorbed in what I was doing, this germ of interest in the spiritual life still persisted, and was fortunately shared by my friend who was also my business partner. I say fortunately, because it was through her that I came to the Vedanta Society of Southern California.

It happened this way. She flew to Los Angeles on a business trip. When she returned to London some weeks later she told me that she had visited the Vedanta Society in Hollywood a number of times. I knew of it, of course, having read the excellent collection of articles, *Vedanta for the Western World*, and I understood vaguely that Huxley, Heard, Isherwood, and van Druten were connected with it. Through my friend I learned that it was part of a Hindu religious Order, that the head of it was an Indian monk, Swami

Prabhavananda, and that it had a convent and monastery where American monastics lived. My interest in this description yielded to astonishment when she said that she wished to go back to the Society and suggested that I look for another business partner!

In the weeks that followed I went through a prolonged agony of indecision. I was attracted, as I had been in the past, by the idea of trying to lead a meditative life, and wondered whether at last the chance of doing so was being offered to me. On the other hand, tugging at me was my ambition to go on with my work in the theatre. My friend at no time encouraged me to accompany her to California. She had brought back some books with her—works of Swami Vivekananda in particular—and these I read with interest. I asked many questions about the Vedanta Society. She answered them but did not enthuse about anything. I toyed with the thought of going there myself, and a minute later scoffed at the idea. An ashrama in Hollywood! What an unlikely place. Probably full of eccentric, neurotic characters. Then I took stock of myself and the life I had been leading for the past year. All the scheming, superficiality, and rottenness. There is an Oriental saying: You can't play with charcoal without getting dirty fingers. I saw that I was really no better than the people I condemned. I saw that if I continued in the theatre business as I had been doing, the time would eventually come when I would get so used to it that I would no longer want to change my way of life and even be incapable of doing so. And what was my life? Why was I in this business at all? To increase my bank balance and maybe get a few headlines in the newspapers. And if I succeeded in this, what then? Going on with the same old thing, frightened of losing what I'd got, chronically restless and trying not to think about how basically unhappy I was.

In my dilemma I sought advice from many friends. They all advised me to stay where I was. After all, they urged, had not one of London's best-known and long-established leading ladies agreed to appear in a play on which our management not only had an option but also, through our having largely rewritten it, a share of the author's royalties? How could I turn my back on

that? I wavered. But inside me, growing more insistent as the days passed, was the still, small voice telling me beyond all reason, logic, and even common sense, that it was right for me to go to California to the Vedanta Society where, through meditation and the practice of renunciation, there was a chance of my finding something real and worth while. I was at the crossroads, and this opportunity might never come again. So, in the face of considerable opposition and head-shaking all round, I sailed for California in the summer of 1951. In my heart were fear of the unknown and many misgivings and conceited prejudices, but underneath all these was the instinctive feeling—I would even call it an unshakable conviction—that what I was doing was right for me and the inevitable culmination of everything that had happened in my life.

What impressed me on my first contact with the Vedanta Society of Southern California? I met a few of the nuns living here, American girls. They were charming, friendly, and unaffected. As I got to know them a little better I saw that they possessed a sense of humour. I liked them from the start; they were people I could talk to, people I would like to have for my friends. And thus my initial prejudice about eccentrics died a rapid death!

A few days after my arrival (my friend and I had rented a small house near the Centre) I was invited to lunch and met Swami Prabhavananda. He scared me a little. He still does. Or perhaps scared is the wrong word; I think what I mean is that in his presence I feel a sense of awe and reverence, which is mixed up with a lot of other emotions. He conveyed so much love and understanding that I felt immediately drawn to him. I did not exchange with him more than the perfunctory salutations customary when one is introduced to a person in a room full of people, and anyway he did not pay much attention to me. His monastic family and a few householders were seated at the table, and he was laughing and joking with them. I sought a private interview with the Swami and had to wait several weeks for an appointment.

When I finally sat with him in his study, he gazed at me gravely from behind his desk and asked quietly, 'What can I do for you?' I was dumb-struck. I had prepared in my mind quite a speech about myself and my reasons for my seven-thousand-mile pilgrimage to Hollywood, but it was all forgotten. The gist of what I said might best be conveyed by quoting these lines from T. S. Eliot's *Cocktail Party*:

I don't in the least know what I am doing
Or why I am doing it. There is nothing else to do:
That is the reason.

I told him I wished to learn how to meditate, and he asked me what was my conception of God.

'Oh, the Impersonal, Swami. I think I visualize God as the ocean or sky or something very vast.'

'Is there any holy personality that appeals to you?'

'Well, yes, I've always had a great admiration for Buddha.'

He gave me a few instructions. Then I asked him if he would accept me as his disciple and initiate me one day. (I had read about such things.)

'Gladly,' he replied.

And that was the end of the conversation which had lasted less than ten minutes.

I started attending meditation regularly three times a day in the shrine. It was in this shrine that I first understood what was meant by the term 'spiritual atmosphere'. The altar is lovely to look at, with pictures of Ramakrishna, Christ, Holy Mother, and statues of Buddha and Krishna all decorated with fresh flowers every day, tall candles burning, and the fragrance of incense. Even from the beginning it never seemed strange to me to sit cross-legged on the floor with my eyes closed, trying to think of God. It seemed inevitable and natural in a way that defies analysis or explanation. I also went to public lectures and classes held in the temple, and was allowed to help with some work in the office several times a week. I read a great deal. The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna especially claimed my attention. At first I found it a

bit 'putting-off' with its frequent descriptions of the Master's samadhi, but as I continued to read his wonderful teachings, the spiritual implications of which can be applied to all religions, I found the specifically Hindu character of the Master's setting less bizarre. Ramakrishna began to interest me very much indeed.

Thus the months passed rapidly—these things die hard—but basically I felt at home as I never had before, and I was increasingly attracted by this way of life. In due course I received initiation, and then asked Swami if he would one day accept me as a monastic member of the community. He told me I would have to wait quite a while; to begin with it was a rule that a householder with monastic aspirations must be in close contact with the Centre for at least a year before being accepted, and also Swami had reservations about me and my suitability for this type of life. He felt that I was still too unstable and restless, he said, but gave me hope that in time he would consider my application favourably.

I had entered the United States on a visitor's visa. I tried to get my status altered to that of a resident, but it proved impossible and the immigration authorities informed me that when my visitor's visa expired I would have to leave the country. If I wished to re-enter as an immigrant and stay here permanently, I would be best advised to return to London and make my arrangements from there. This did not appeal to me; I had no wish to break with the life I had begun only six months before. It was then that the idea of going to India occurred to me. I discussed it with Swami Prabhavananda who gave his approval and suggested that I should go to Bangalore and place myself under the spiritual guidance of his brother monk, Swami Yatiswarananda. I was not enthusiastic.

'But you are my guru, Swami,' I remonstrated.

'Swami Yatiswarananda is a holy man. Treat him as your guru. Open your heart to him. He can help you.'

I did not want to go to India especially; it merely seemed a preferable alternative to that of going back to England. The idea was that I should remain in India about six months, then go to London and arrange to come back to America permanently, by

which time I hoped Swami would let me come to live at the Centre as a probationer nun. But this seemed a long way off.

I was miserable at leaving Swami and his monastic family of whom I had grown so fond. I wondered if we would ever meet again. Actually it was to be three years before I finally returned to the Hollywood Centre to live.

I spent two years in India. While I was there, Swami Prabhavananda wrote me, in January 1953, that he would accept me as a nun at the Centre and that he already thought of me as a monastic. He added that I was to remain in India for at least another year and listed all the holy places of pilgrimage that he wished me to visit. At the same time, in response to repeated requests, he gave me a Sanskrit name, *Daya*.

My first sixteen months were spent in close association with Swami Yatiswarananda, who is not only the head of the Ramakrishna Ashrama in Bangalore, but as one of the most senior monks of the Order is a member of the governing body of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. His duties frequently took him to other centres on tours of inspection. Yet, in spite of his heavy schedule, he made himself responsible for my welfare in every way from the moment I arrived, and was always accessible when one needed advice. I lived in an apartment some two miles from the ashrama, and on one occasion when I was sick in bed with a minor ailment he walked the distance under the hot midday sun to see for himself how I was. He was kindly yet stern, with a delightful sense of humour. He had an infectious chuckle when he was amused and loved to tell funny stories. He had a book of jokes of the 'shaggy-dog' variety, and these he would quote in his lectures. He treated me exactly as his own disciple, and would scold me whenever I needed it. He had spent seventeen years in the West, forming groups of Vedanta students in Germany, Holland, and Switzerland, and he gathered together the nucleus which became the French Vedanta Centre. In America during the war he founded the Vedanta Society of Philadelphia, and then returned to India. I regard it as one of the great blessings of my life to have been under his guidance.

It is impossible to give an account of my sojourn in India and do justice to it without entering into a wealth of detail which would take me beyond the confines of an article of this nature. So let me only say, at the risk of being considered effusive, that the over-all impression of this experience, as I look back on it, is that of a spiritual feast. Sitting at the feet of some of the senior swamis of the Order—holy men who were disciples of Sri Sarada Devi or of Swami Brahmananda—each with a different personality and yet conveying, in some cases very palpably, what I can only inadequately term spiritual stature; entering ancient Hindu temples where the atmosphere is at once exalting, mysterious, and dramatic; living in the guesthouse of this and that ashrama of the Order; staying in the homes of Hindu families, these—and so many more incidents that come to mind as I write—all add up to the most wonderful experience I have ever had. Simply to think back on it gives me great joy.

After returning to Europe in the summer of 1954, I had to wait more than six months for my American visa. I spent several weeks with my family in London, and the rest of the time I lived at the French Vedanta Centre which is less than an hour's journey from Paris. The months spent at this Centre were very happy ones for me. In many ways this ashrama reminded me of the Vedanta Society in Hollywood; over a dozen monastics live there, French men and women drawn from all walks of life. The Centre consists of a small château surrounded by several hundred acres of land. The place is run as a farm, with cows, chickens, rabbits, wheat, corn, and barley. Two public lectures are held every Sunday, attended by some two hundred people who make the journey from Paris.

The swami then in charge, Swami Siddheswarananda, was sent from India to found the Centre in 1937. He learned to speak French fluently and for many years lectured regularly to large audiences at the Sorbonne. I look upon my own guru, Swami Prabhananda, as my spiritual father, and Swami Siddheswarananda I regarded as a much loved spiritual uncle. He too was a disciple of Swami Brahmananda. Tall and regal in appearance, he was warm-

hearted, witty, and possessed an amazing understanding of the human heart. He was very devotional, and in spite of ill-health frequently performed the daily ritual worship himself. He also enjoyed metaphysical discussions and, surprisingly, had a genuine love and appreciation of Western classical music, his preference being for Beethoven and Bach. In India I had been the guest for one week of his family in Cochin State. He died in April 1957.

In January 1955 my immigrant's visa was ready at last. I went for my final interview with the U.S. Consul.

'What is your purpose in wishing to live in the United States, Miss Rayne?'

I thought it better not to beat about the bush; after all, I had my visa now, and it seemed unlikely that they would take it back on the grounds of insanity.

'I'm joining a Hindu convent in Hollywood,' I answered, with a casualness that implied that nothing could be more natural.

'A Hindu convent? Miss Rayne, you've made my day for me. Usually people tell me they want to emigrate to America in order to make money—whereas you—oh, I'm not saying you're wrong or anything. It's just that your case is something of a novelty to me, that's all. Well, here are your papers, and good luck.'

Within a few days I flew to California. I was home for good after an absence of almost exactly three years.

In a sense I suppose I could say that I came to religion because life without it was unbearable. I could only have remained a Christian had I stayed outside the Church. An increasing number of Christian spiritual aspirants, unable to accept the orthodoxies of any particular sect, do exactly this. But I was not strong enough even to wish to make the attempt. I was instinctively attracted by the implications of what little I understood of such Vedantic terms as meditation, yoga, superconsciousness, the identity of Atman and Brahman. In turning to any religion, once one has got beyond childhood, one accepts concepts that appeal both to one's reason and emotions. Whatever faith one chooses depends upon individual temperament. There are many ways to God, and

many types of human beings. Ramakrishna said: 'The different faiths are but so many different paths to God. . . . Follow your own path, but never think that your way alone is right, and that every-one else's is wrong.'

The most important aspect of Vedanta, for me, is its insistence upon regular meditation. Meditation is the struggle to concentrate the mind upon one's conception of God, and to assert constantly one's identity with the Divine. I find it a source of strength to believe that in my essential nature I am one with God and that one day this belief will become a fact of experience. 'I am weak, I am a sinner', are probably perfectly true statements when applied to the personality of Joan Rayne, but Joan Rayne, thank heaven, is not the real me. She is a bundle of tendencies, good and bad, a bundle of cravings and aversions, all of which are ephemeral and therefore unreal. It is profitless and harmful to dwell too much on the negative aspects of this little personality. On the contrary, it is my business as a spiritual aspirant to purify my mind by thinking of my oneness with God. It was this emphasis upon positive thinking that drew me to Vedanta, and also the fact that I was not called upon to believe blindly in anything. Vedanta says: 'You are God—but you don't know it yet. Don't accept this statement just because somebody has made it or because you've read it somewhere. You can, and indeed must, realize this truth for yourself as others have done. All that is required of you is the willingness to practise spiritual disciplines.' So in a very real sense Vedanta is a challenge. It calls for action. Simply to say 'I believe' will never transform my life.

My preference of Hindu methods of worship and my attraction to Hindu philosophy make me an adherent of this Indian religion. But one must never lose sight of the fact that, in its highest reaches, the tenets of Vedanta confirm the essential teachings of all other major religions. The mystical experience is the meeting-ground of Christian, Jew, Mohammedan, Buddhist, and Hindu. The realization that 'I and my Father are one' is common to men of all faiths who have reached God-vision.

It is only since I came to Vedanta that I have been able to

understand many of the teachings in the New Testament. I like very much one Vedantist's interpretation of the Holy Trinity, and make no apology for giving it here. God the Father is Brahman, the all-pervading spirit; the Son is the divine incarnation—Christ, Buddha, Ramakrishna, or any other that appeals to the worshipper; the Holy Ghost is the Atman, God within each one of us, who is also identical with God the Father, Brahman.

I have now been living at the Hollywood Centre as a probationer nun for nearly three years, and have been a Vedantist, in the sense of actually embarking on the spiritual life, for over six. My daily routine has not varied a great deal since I first came. I work in the office and bookshop, and find my duties absorbing. About every month and a half it comes round to my turn to perform the ritual worship in the shrine for a week. Now and again I am able to take a day off from the office routine to do some cooking, occasionally preparing a curry or a Hindu dessert for one of our religious festivals. Like everyone else here, I meditate three times a day for a period of one hour each. Again, like everyone else, I have my ups and downs, my struggles, set-backs, my joys. At no time since I arrived have I had any desire to return to the world. I like the monastic life, and I never cease to be glad that my karma brought me to it.

It will not be out of place for me to mention a fact for which I am more grateful than I can possibly say. It is that my mother, who was born and remains a Protestant, and who reads the Bible every day, wholeheartedly approves of my turning to Vedanta and embracing the monastic life. She met both of the swamis of the Hollywood Centre when they were in London, and, indeed, requested Swami Prabhavananda to give her a Sanskrit name, which he did! She wrote me a letter referring to the morning when she met Swami as one of the biggest days of her life. It is not that my mother has mere tolerance for my beliefs which in many ways differ from hers—religious tolerance has become quite the fashion these days, but it often carries with it an unpleasant overtone of condescension—it is rather that she has a genuine respect for my convictions. My father died some years ago, but from what I

know of his liberal outlook and his voracious reading of philosophy, I am sure that he also would have encouraged me in my present way of life.

Since being at the Vedanta Society I have made a discovery: prayers do get answered! Many things are bound up with this fact, and I shall try to sort them out. It will mean digressing a little. Everybody who becomes a spiritual aspirant does so because he wants to realize God; he feels that this goal, when achieved, is the one thing that can give him the peace and happiness which he craves. But there are many stages leading up to illumination, stages which are marked by a gradual transformation of character. Getting rid of bad tendencies and the cultivation of good ones is the sole criterion by which spiritual progress can be judged, and is, moreover, indispensable to the development within one of some measure of peace and serenity, without which it is not possible to meditate properly.

For example, one may find oneself totally unable to resist yielding to some bad impulse. So one prays for help. No help comes. We fall again and again, as our prayer continues to be ignored. This is because the prayer does not come from the heart; we do not as yet really want to get rid of whatever weakness it is that claims us. We know we should, but that is not enough. We are still identified with the momentary pleasure we derive by giving in to some weakness, and the temptation overshadows the inevitable reaction of pain. As time passes, however, with each failure we grow more discouraged and more disgusted with ourselves, and this increased reaction of suffering begins to balance and eventually outweigh the satisfaction experienced. We begin to find that indulgence in a specific weakness we are trying to overcome in no way compensates for the pain which follows. In other words, we identify the pleasure with suffering, and we begin genuinely to hate and dread temptation, against which, however, we may still be powerless. And it is then only, in the depths of despair, that one can really pray from the heart for the removal of a frailty.

St. Augustine tells us that in the early days of his novitiate he used to pray, 'O Lord, give me chastity and continence, but do not give it yet.' Now it is perfectly possible to have a weakness of one kind or another which one is not too intent upon removing right now, in the same way that one may be very lukewarm about wanting to cultivate certain desirable virtues. One can still pray from the heart, however, and ask the Lord to help one want the right things with a greater intensity. 'O Lord, help me to want to get rid of this fault,' or 'Help me to want to meditate; help me to want to feel devotion.'

Such prayers from the heart do bring results. And the aim of all this is not to become a moral paragon, but to free the mind at least to some extent from its cravings and aversions, its negative obsessions of fear, remorse, self-loathing, and thus enable it to think of God. And the more one can meditate on God, the more one will find that the spiritual life can bring joy and sweetness into one's heart while still struggling to reach the goal of God-vision.

In the spiritual life, I have found, there are tangible results along the way—it is not one long grind without respite and with only the half-hearted belief in realization sometime in the dim and distant future to hang on to. One gains a measure of peace as one continues to practise meditation; one's equilibrium becomes less dependent upon external circumstances; one feels more love for others; one finds that one is thinking more frequently of the Lord than, say, a year before. Then, too, in the monastic life, there is the love and friendship of other members of the community, which one can have if one wants it. I know for myself that I have been helped and comforted tremendously on occasions by discussing my problems with other monastics; many of them have been through the same trials, and can be genuinely helpful. But making contact with one's fellow-monastics is something that each individual must do for himself. To be shut up within oneself, to keep one's troubles to oneself, to isolate oneself in a monastic community is fatal. If you have a fear of being known, if you grimly 'keep yourself to yourself', no one is going to intrude on your voluntary isolation. It is much better to relinquish one's

pride and remove the barrier, since otherwise you cut yourself off from everything that makes a human relationship more than purely superficial.

This applies also to the relationship with the guru. Here again the disciple must take the first step. The guru will never pry into your affairs and try to draw you out. You must go to him and open your heart. This is not an easy thing to do the first time; one has to overcome natural shyness, embarrassment, pride, and shame. I have found that he makes it much easier than one would anticipate, and he is able to help. This I know from experience. I have gone to my guru a number of times with a very troubled mind and told him all about it. On such occasions he may not say anything very startling or novel; quite often he will remind me of things that he has explained to us all many times before. But within a few hours the load of misery I was carrying inside has been lifted from my heart. I know that he has prayed for me.

The greatness of a true guru lies in his regarding himself merely as an instrument of something much bigger than himself as an individual. He does not ask you to lean on him or to rely too much upon yourself; he throws you at the feet of the Lord. And it is in this fact that there lies, to my way of thinking, the crux of the difference between the spiritual approach to suffering and modern psychiatric methods.

I have seen far more drastic and desirable personality changes effected through the practice of yogic meditation than I have through psychoanalysis. That the results of the latter should be so unimpressive is perhaps not surprising; modern psychiatric therapy is only some seventy years old, whereas Hindu psychological methods date back several thousands of years! Their respective theories, methods, aims, and results are compared admirably in Geraldine Coster's *Yoga and Western Psychology*, a book which I strongly recommend to anyone interested in making a further study of the subject.

So what does Vedanta mean to me? Everything, I suppose, that makes my life worth living. In the past, my greatest enemy

was boredom, and in seeking to avoid this I tried all the known avenues of escape—career, love, gambling, psychiatry, intellectual pursuits—none of which helped and some brought me a good deal of suffering. I was at times in despair over the apparent meaninglessness of human existence, and disillusioned with myself, but I never lost the belief that happiness does exist and that it can be found. And it was this belief, however tenuous and shaky, that brought me to Vedanta.

Since living at the Centre I have known a greater measure of contentment than I would have ever thought possible for a person of my restless disposition. Of course, there are flat days, days when I get depressed or upset or discouraged. But they pass, and I cannot imagine wanting to live any other kind of life. There are people around me who have been here for ten to twenty years—they have struggled and stayed, and not one of them regrets having done so. This fact, the example of the guru, and that of the great souls I met in India, are unfailing sources of inspiration. There is suffering in the world, but no end to it; there is suffering, too, in the spiritual life, but to this there is an end.

Durgacharan

YOU had driven down to Santa Ana in the afternoon and coming back you had had to fight the sun and the traffic all the way.

At Firestone and Long Beach Boulevard there was a pile-up of three cars with a truck. The traffic was stalled for a mile on either side and you were afraid you might miss vespers entirely.

West Adams to Washington, Washington to Venice, Venice to Pico, Pico to Olympic, Olympic to Wilshire Boulevard—all long blocks, crammed with homegoing drivers. You couldn't make any time.

By using Arden instead of Rossmore, you finally got across town by a few minutes before six. Now, with close figuring, it would just be possible to stop at the filling station at the corner of Argyle and Franklin and wash up before turning up the hill to the temple.

As you got back into the car, it began again. Each night it had begun at the same spot at the bottom of the hill. The souvenir stores and cheap dress shops and neon signs on Hollywood Boulevard were no longer real, but the chaste white Hindu temple, dedicated to the divinity of all beings and the perfectability of each soul, this was completely real—and reasonable. It didn't make sense any more to drop in at The Keyhole after work and lift a few with clients or friends, but it made perfect sense to sit in a virtually empty Hindu temple and squint occasionally through half-closed eyes at the backs of some American girls who were trying to become Hindu nuns. *How crazy could a smart publicity man get?*

Tomorrow you would call at the *Times* and the *Examiner* and leave off some items for your clients. In the afternoon you would try to dream up angles that would possibly make the wire services. But all the time, ever since he had talked about cleaning out your mind by pouring fresh water into it, as into an inkwell, whether you were working or eating, when you woke up and when you went to bed, when you looked up from your typewriter at the all-too-familiar chimneys and the big sign 'Roosevelt Hotel' across the way, you had felt as if you were sitting two inches above the chair, walking two inches off the ground. It was even an effort sometimes to get your breath. Between meetings on Sundays and Thursdays you often ached with suspense.

This was why it was so extremely important to get to vespers. So that you could get that knot out of your chest . . . by sitting motionless in the grey auditorium with your eyes closed or just half-closed as you squinted occasionally at the backs of the seated nuns, wrapped in their meditation robes, on the platform.

Dark slender cypresses flanked the walk with its series of ascending steps leading to the temple. At the foot of the cypresses were jasmine beds with sweet-smelling blooms.

Hundreds and hundreds of people all over the world had found the Lord, millions and millions worshipped Him daily in temples, churches, cathedrals, synagogues, and shrines, but you, you chump, you thought He didn't even exist.

The big double doors open easily and now you are standing in the vestibule by the grey desk with the glass top. The glass is cool and moist under your fingers and you stop here for a moment because the current flowing from the shrine at the furthest end of the temple doubles you up. O amazing love, O *gubhyâti gubhya*, O most secret of all secrets.

Purifying, purifying—you who had lied, who had been weak, who had been cruel to those who couldn't retaliate, who had scoffed at religion, who had failed at everything because you didn't believe in anything, whose mind was a swinging pendulum of egoism, self-doubt, and self-loathing—now it was as if you could read in enormous letters over the lintel of the shrine room, over

the great beam above the wide entrance that led into the holy of holies:

THOU HAST NOT CHOSEN ME
I HAVE CHOSEN THEE

How cool it was and quiet here in the temple. You let yourself down into a pew near the rear. Now slip off your shoes, this is holy ground. As always, the nuns were arranged more or less in a semicircle on the platform in front of the shrine. Their shrouded backs were motionless. You asked the Lord to bless the nuns in the only words that would come: 'Lord, please bless these girls. May they find You soon. May they.'

Just as we wash the body, the mind can be washed every day, he said. The way to clean an inkwell is to keep pouring in clean water until there is no ink left, nothing but pure water.

You see, in spiritual life there is no failure. You may work hard at your business and, for reasons beyond your control, you may fail. But in spiritual life there is no failure. No effort is wasted. (He said this again and again.)

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'The farther you go to the north, the farther you are from the south!'

The breeze of His grace is always blowing. All we have to do is to raise our sail.

Occasionally you passed people on the street whom you recognized as having seen at the temple. Ships that passed without a hail, but were these strangers, these totally new people, were these the real people in your life, your past lives? Were all the other people you had known before just the spectators and were these new faces the real participants in your life whom you had now met at last? What a fool you were never to have imagined that your barber, the bus driver, the last salesman who called on you, even some of your profit-chasing clients, considered themselves *children of the Lord*, while you just thought of yourself as superior, a highly superior failure.

It is the prodigal son whom the Lord loves best, he said.

God is nearer to us than breathing, nearer than the next room. He is our very self. He loves us more than we will ever know. He loves us though we completely forget Him.

The Lord runs to a person who prays to Him with a sincere heart. If you take ten steps towards Him, He will take a hundred steps towards you. He loves us more than father or than mother.

Such ideas had been spoken and written by monks and saints of the Middle Ages, you thought, or they could be found in translations from the Japanese or Persian. They weren't discussed in Hollywood, not in this vortex of worldly ambition and sensualism. But the fact was, they were being discussed in Hollywood and not only in Hollywood, but all over the world, everywhere. It was you who were blind and deaf, not the others. For millions of others had lived all their lives with what to you was a brand-new idea. Practically the whole human race was looking to God, praying to God, living in the world of God.

Set aside a time every day when you surrender yourself to God completely. Forget the world for the time being. Just think of God. Remember Him. Chant His name.

When you go to bed, try to think of Him. When you wake up, think of Him. When you do your work, think of Him. Not that you are asking for His help. Just think of Him. You are in His presence. Be aware of it.

You can't move a muscle without the power of God. In all your life you have seen nothing but God. No matter where you are, in the street as well as in retreat, think of God. This is the whole secret of spiritual life.

The one meaning and purpose of life is to find God, to become one with Him.

There is a sound of movement on the platform. You open your eyes. The nuns are standing, their bare feet and ankles visible below their meditation robes. To the rhythm of the bell they chant. Earth, water, fire, air are offered to the Lord, the gifts back to the Giver.

Will I find Him? you think, and along with the question the answer comes, 'Thou wouldst not seek Me if thou hadst not found Me.' Completely unbelievable—and convincing.

Now the nuns are seated again, reciting in unison:

'Breaker of this world's chain, we adore thee
Whom all men love. . . .
Speech cannot hold thee, nor mind,
Yet without thee we think not nor speak.
Love, who art partial to none,
We are equal before thy sight. . . .'

Equal before His sight, you and the nuns and all who offer their worship. It is dark as you leave the temple and walk swiftly down between the cypresses to the street. At the foot of the hill you turn the car into Hollywood Boulevard, wondering where to eat. The souvenir stores and cheap dress shops and neon signs are all there, but not as they used to be, never again as they used to be.

Pravrajika Saradaprana

PERHAPS my thoughts as I was sitting on the bank of the Ganges might tell in part the story of what Vedanta means to me. Last year in the company of Swami Prabhavananda and several other Vedanta students I went to India for a six months' visit. We stayed at the Belur Monastery, which is the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order. Its spacious and lovely grounds are located along the edge of the river about ten miles from Calcutta. We travelled to different parts of India, but we would always return to Belur. During our intermittent stays at the monastery it was a favourite pastime of mine to sit under the sandalwood tree that grows on the lawn sloping down to the river embankment, and muse as I watched the Ganges flow gently on its course.

As I sat there I could look up at the corner room of the old monastery where Swami Vivekananda had lived. In the early days only a few knew of and sought out the company of the Swami and his brother disciples in what was then their mosquito-infested, malarial hermitage. Today hundreds of visitors come daily to the monastery to meditate in the shrines or to sit with a swami in some corner of the tree-shaded lawns. One sees many brahma-charis in white and swamis in gerrua walking back and forth on the pathways, busy with their different tasks, each being moulded in the ideal of renunciation of ego and service to God in mankind, which are the twin ideals of the Ramakrishna Order.

Looking up the river about two miles away I could see the spires of the Kali temple lifting their heads above the bridge that spans the river right next to the Dakshineswar garden. It was there that a wonderful story began, or rather that an eternal story continued with new life and freshness. For there the currents of

India's ancient Vedantic tradition—the realization of Self of her Upanishads—the fervent divine love of her Srimad Bhagavatam and Puranas—the spirit of controlled scientific experimentation of her yoga systems and Tantric disciplines—converged into a vortex of incredible power in the delicate frame of Sri Ramakrishna. As a boy he saw, which is so rare in our peculiarly deluded world where nothing is more difficult of discovery than the obvious, that the solid term 'I' veils a restless, changing existence which ends in death. That the powers, beauty, and life of the 'I' and the things of the world are but flickering revelations of the reality that lies behind them. Therefore he could not value the world of appearances like other men do, or centre his consciousness in the unsubstantial ego. It became a passion with him to reach that reality, and he directed the streams of his feeling and reason into one torrent that carried him straight to the sea of God. All the rest of his life he lived in the constant awareness of that engulfing divine sea; his face and eyes shining and sparkling with the joy of swimming in it. In later years when his disciples gathered around him they would sit entranced by the indescribable charm of his personality that radiated such sweetness and serenity. One moment they saw him caught up in divine ecstasy and the next moment talking spiritedly to them of the life of renunciation of lust and greed. Through him they could peep as through a window into the breathtaking beauty of the Spirit. Often he would glance at his disciples or touch them on the heart and they themselves would be swept up to a glimpse of reality.

It happened that way to young Narendra Nath, and some years later when he went to America as Swami Vivekananda, it was from his experience as well as the genius of his mind that he could translate the message of Vedanta into a language that was understandable to us. In the West we had had some contact with the Vedantic thought through a few scholarly translations of the Bhagavad-Gita, or through the interpretations of Thoreau and Emerson. But Vivekananda came like one dripping wet from a dip in the ocean, and when he said words to the effect, 'Come on in; the water's fine!' the people of America responded. They rallied

around him, forming centres of enthusiasm for Vedanta wherever he went.

It was also in that quiet garden of Dakshineswar that the young boy Rakhal grew into the Swami Brahmananda whose magnetic personality was a cohesive power in the fast-growing new Order. Many young men were first attracted to the spiritual life by him. A few of these are now in America in answer to the demand for teachers of Vedanta.

Swami Prabhavananda is one of these. It was at his Centre, tucked away in the foothills of Hollywood, that I first came to know of Vedanta twelve years ago. I came during the last year of high school. Up to then life had been mostly spent in going to school and living like most girls of my age. I never noticed any religious inclinations in myself, and whatever religious stimuli existed in my environment never made enough impression on me to cause me to pursue religion further or even question about it. At that age I was becoming a little conscious of some of my incredible premises about life—premises based on the daydreaming of the ego and probably strengthened by the influence of the movies, of advertising, and of the wishful-thinking conversations of others. Experience was beginning to show how inadequate and false they were. Perhaps my first exclamation about Vedanta, 'It is so true!' was an expression of joy at having found a truer set of premises to live by, a more adequate map of reality.

The teachings of Vedanta are to me like a map of the spiritual realm, which was charted long ago by the explorers of the Upanishads, but which include the markings of the great discoverers of Spirit of all countries and ages. But what is so terribly significant to me is that in our time Ramakrishna and his disciples actually journeyed to that realm. It is their enthusiastic reports that made the idea of travelling there myself conceivable and desirable. [When the swamis in teaching Vedanta tell us that the true nature of man is divine, and the goal of life is to realize this divine nature, it is important to me that they can point in proof of such statements to the experiences of these men. Their lives show the possibility of realizing that divine nature and re-emphasize the

fact that religion is essentially a matter of direct, personal experience. Again, the third Vedantic premise, that the different religions are so many paths to God, was not a mere verbal formula with Ramakrishna, but an experience of the same ineffable truth which he realized by following the methods of the different sects of Hinduism, and the ways of Islam and Christianity. Therefore when I walked up the steps to the Vedanta temple, it did not mean a turning away from Christianity, but rather it was an exciting discovery of Christianity, because it was reading the teachings of the Bible and the lives of the Christian saints in the context of Vedanta that made them meaningful to me.

Sitting on the bank of the Ganges last year, and reflecting on my experiences of India, I was struck by how completely at home I felt there. There were reasons for this. For one thing the Indian scene with its jackfruit and mango trees, its cows meandering about even on the busy streets of Calcutta, the ubiquitous crows, the long stretches of rice fields with their clumps of coconut palms that we saw everywhere through the train windows, its village girls balancing water jars on their heads as they walked down the dusty village roads, had a particular charm and familiarity because Ramakrishna had referred constantly to these aspects of India in his parables. India was like a picture book whose every scene illustrated some spiritual truth.

Then, too, I felt no barriers between myself and the people of India, even with those who represented the farthest points in Indian culture from the culture of the West. The Ramakrishna Order has been largely responsible for breaking down the barriers of prejudice and mistrust which have long obstructed a really fruitful contact between the East and the West. In the first place, Swami Vivekananda's bringing Vedanta to the West opened our eyes to the depth and richness of the philosophy of India, and we learned to appreciate her contribution of spirituality as a counterbalance in our world of more materialistic values. On the other hand, Swami Vivekananda urged India to learn from the West the means of working out her physical problems of

poverty, starvation, and disease. He felt strongly that the 'ideal' culture would neglect neither the spiritual nor the material needs of men. In the motto of renunciation and service of the Order, he attempted to epitomize that ideal culture. The monks dedicate themselves to the realization of God through meditation, thus keeping intact the ascetic tradition of India, but at the same time they look upon mankind as a manifestation of God and serve Him in the sick and hungry, using the most modern knowledge and equipment of the West in their numerous philanthropic institutions all over the country. In 1897 when Vivekananda returned from the West he brought with him American and British disciples who dedicated themselves to the welfare of India, and a few of them even became monks and nuns of the Order. Since then the organization has stood in the middle, as it were, making the friendly introductions of the West to the East, until a strong reciprocation of understanding and interest has grown up.

We realized a sympathetic relationship with some orthodox sections of Indian society that would not only have been incongruous but impossible some years ago; with the group of sannnyasins in Hardwar who watched us as we talked with the head of their monastery; with the Vaishnava priest who welcomed us at the train in the city of Puri, and who later took us into the temple of Jagannath; and with the brahmin who worshipped in the small shrine of the Divine Mother connected with the home where we stayed in the little village of Vishnupur.

Sri Ramakrishna had said, 'It is the same ocean of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss that the worshippers of the impersonal call Brahman, that the Shaivas call Shiva, that the Vaishnavas call Krishna, and the Christians call God and Jesus.' While in India I found how enriching it is even to make an attempt to feel the presence of God through other men's conceptions of Him. During our stay in the holy city of Benares, when we made our way before dawn through the narrow streets to the temple of Vishwanath to offer bel leaves and water to Shiva with the worshippers of Shiva; and when we stood with the crowd outside a shrine in Vrindavan, almost catching their breathless anticipation, waiting to have

darshan of the beautiful image of Krishna; and again some months later in Rome when standing beside a nun who was kneeling at the altar in St. Peter's, I had the warm and happy feeling that we are all reaching towards the same One, though our symbols and means of striving are different.

Those years ago, as a high-school girl living in a very small world, I went through the doors of the little Vedanta temple of Hollywood. On the other side of the doors I found a vaster world—a world where the boundaries between East and West were barely discernible, and where categories like Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, and Hinduism were not high separating walls but merely names for the different beautiful colours of light seen through a prism. I could see the magnificent mountain peaks in the distance and there the incarnations, prophets, and saints were beckoning all to climb up and see as they saw—the ocean of blissful consciousness behind every being and thing, and the variegated, changing universe as a joyous return to that ocean.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

The Vedanta Society of Southern California has published a magazine since 1938, called *Vedanta and the West*. Its editor and moving spirit since inception has been Swami Prabhavananda, leader of the Society. Two collections of articles from *Vedanta and the West* have been published: *Vedanta for the Western World* in 1945 and *Vedanta for Modern Man* in 1951. The present volume also is made up of selections which appeared first in *Vedanta and the West*, most of them since 1951.

VINCENT SHEEAN, who contributed the Foreword to the present work, is the author of a number of books, including *Lead, Kindly Light*, one of the most understanding accounts available on contemporary India and the place of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in the modern renaissance of Hinduism.

GERALD SYKES is the author of *The Nice American*, *The Center of the Stage*, and *The Children of Light*. His contribution appeared in the May-June 1953 number of *Vedanta and the West* under the title 'Touring India at a Distance'.

The selection by ALDOUS HUXLEY, novelist and essayist, appeared first in the March-April 1944 issue of *Vedanta and the West* under the title 'The Minimum Working Hypothesis'. Somewhat revised, it formed a part of Sebastian's Notebook in the novel *Time Must Have a Stop*, published by Harper & Brothers in the same year. The version here reprinted is the revised one, and is used with the permission of the author and of Harper & Brothers.

GERALD HEARD is a writer and lecturer. His 'What Vedanta Means to Me' was first published in *Vedanta and the West* in the January-February 1951 number.

CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD, the novelist, wrote his 'What Vedanta Means to Me' in 1951. The piece was published first in the magazine's September-October issue of that year. It was subsequently reprinted and distributed in large numbers in pamphlet form. It was extended for book publication by the author in 1958.

JOHN VAN DRUTEN, the playwright, died at his desert home near Thermal, California, on 18 December 1957. He had for years been interested in Eastern philosophy and was a good friend of the Vedanta movement. His 'What Vedanta Means to Me' was printed first in *Vedanta and the West* in the March-April 1952 issue, and was corrected for the present book publication by the author in 1957.

MARIANNA MASIN's article appeared originally in *Vedanta and the West* in May-June 1957. She was born in the Jewish faith, received her M.D. degree at the University of Prague, and emigrated, first to Venezuela, thence to the United States, after the Close of World War II.

J. CRAWFORD LEWIS, now retired, was an orchardist of the famed Yakima Valley in the state of Washington. His 'What Vedanta Means to Me' was printed first in the September-October 1952 issue of *Vedanta and the West*.

DOROTHY F. MERCER is on the English faculty of the City College of San Francisco. Her story was first published in *Vedanta and the West* in January-February 1957.

KURT FRIEDRICHS is a West German businessman. He and his wife Irene head a Vedanta study group in Hamburg. His contribution appeared originally in *Vedanta and the West* in the May-June issue 1951.

SWAMI ATULANANDA is one of the few Western-born swamis of the Ramakrishna Order. He was born in 1870 in Holland. His name: Cornelius Heyblom. As a young man he emigrated to the United States where he came under the influence of Vedanta. He moved to India permanently and received his sannyas there in 1923. The selection by Swami Atulananda, which appeared in *Vedanta and the West* in November-December 1956, was reworked from two articles by him

that had been printed some thirty-five years previously in one of the Order's English-language journals in India, *Prabuddha Bharata*.

JANE MOLARD is an American married to a Frenchman and living in Paris. The piece by her was printed first in *Vedanta and the West* in May-June 1958.

THE COUNTESS OF SANDWICH, formerly Amiya Corbin, was church secretary at the Vedanta Society of Southern California for some twenty years prior to her marriage and return to Great Britain in 1952. She was managing editor of *Vedanta and the West* for a time. Her contribution appeared first in the magazine's March-April 1957 issue.

JOHN YALE joined the Vedanta Society as a probationary monastic in 1950. He was given his first vows in the Ramakrishna Order in 1955, receiving the name Brahmachari Prema Chaitanya. His 'What Vedanta Means to Me' article appeared first in the November-December 1955 number of *Vedanta and the West* and was reworked in 1958 for the present collection.

Some who attempt monastic life find such to be their vocation. A good many find that it is not and leave after a shorter or longer period. But in general those who give up do so with regret, continuing afterwards to regard the life of the monk or nun as an ideal one, continuing also to be glad for their own experience in the monastery or convent, however short it may have been. Such is the case with JOAN RAYNE. While she writes as a probationary nun, her story having been published in *Vedanta and the West* in November-December 1957, she went back in the following year to a career in writing but maintains a close relationship with Swami Prabhavananda and her previous monastic associates.

DURGACHARAN is the pen name of a Beverly Hills advertising executive who has been a student of Vedanta for many years. His story was printed originally under the title 'The Fool Said in His Heart' in the September-October 1956 issue of *Vedanta and the West*.

Commencement of a women's branch was postponed for many years after the organization in 1897 of the Ramakrishna Order. When a

convent finally was constituted it was permitted first to be organized in 1947 in Hollywood under the auspices of the Vedanta Society of Southern California. A girl named Ruth Folling had come to the Society with monastic intentions in 1940, at the age of seventeen. When the convent was formally established seven years later she became its first member, receiving the name Brahmacharini Sarada. In India the women's work was opened on the hundredth anniversary of Sri Sarada Devi's birth, in 1954. A number of Indian women who had lived dedicated lives for many years previously were given monastic status at that time. In 1959 several seniors among them were given the final vows of sannyas, becoming swamis, or pravrajikas. Later in the same year Brahmacharini Sarada, together with four other senior brahmacharinis at the Vedanta Society of Southern California, took their vows of sannyas in America. Brahmacharini Sarada became PRAVRAJIKA SARADAPRANA. Her 'What Vedanta Means to Me', written shortly after a first trip to India in 1949-50, was published originally in the July-August 1951 issue of *Vedanta and the West*.

